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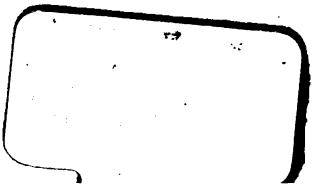

CONVERSION:

IN A

SERIES OF ALL THE CASES RECORDED

IN THE

NEW TESTAMENT,

DEFECTIVE, DOUBTFUL, REAL.

INTENDED AS

A HELP TO SELF-EXAMINATION.

BY THE REV. J. K. CRAIG, Oxon.,

INCUMBENT OF OULTON-CUM-WOODLESFORD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

"Many great services have been performed, many glorious works are wrought by men, which yet are utterly rejected by God, and shall never stand upon record in order to an eternal acceptation, because they took no heed to keep their heart with Him."—*Flavel.*

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TO THE RIGHT REVEREND

CHARLES RICHARD,

LORD BISHOP OF WINCHESTER.

My Lord,

It has frequently in the course of my duties as a Clergyman been matter with me of thankfulness to Almighty God that I received my 'authority to preach the Gospel' by the laying on of your hands, and of those of another devoted, and since right reverend, Presbyter, nearly related to yourself, who was then present. The solemn Charge which you then addressed to us, and the Sermon then preached, and since printed, by that eminent Prelate, (from Rev. xi. 15.—"THE KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD ARE BECOME THE KINGDOMS OF OUR LORD, AND OF HIS CHRIST; AND HE SHALL REIGN FOR EVER AND EVER")—together with your Lordship's earnest and fervent counsel and truly pastoral feeling to all your candidates, will, I trust for myself, abide always for good in my remembrance. Your Lordship's permission to inscribe to you this small effort in the cause of truth is, therefore I need not say, a gratifying encouragement to me in such an undertaking. That he who is "the Head over all things to his Church" may long preserve to it your faithful and zealous labours is the sincere prayer of

My Lord,

Your Lordship's devoted and faithful Servant,

J. K. CRAIG.

Oulton Parsonage,
November 22nd, 1832.

God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine: before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up thy strength, and come, and save us."

The design of the present work is to lead those who read it to faithful self-examination and scriptural self-discipline. The Church, as it now is, abounds, perhaps judicially, with temptations and false lights. Its chiefest snare is one which is directly the converse of that which obtains in the day of persecution and adversity; it is not the "*fear*" but the "*praise* of man;"—"how can ye believe which receive honour one from another, and seek not the honour which cometh from God only?" To this spirit of vain-glory may be traced, none shall say how much, but certainly an enormous amount of all that is acted for God upon the platform of public endeavour. The manifold schisms and divisions—the putting forth of strange doctrines new and old—the constant aiming at notoriety—the efforts laborious for distinction in public speaking and preaching in order to appropriate a measure of the age's indulgence in idolatry—even the rigorous customs, restrictions, and separations of many that differ from the world—even the visits of fashionable members to the poor, distributings of tracts, or collectings of money for Institutions—arise, or are done, from motives of selfish interest, and, more than all others, from this disposition to the spirit of vain-glory.

In the midst of these evil things, it is surely more than ever a duty to those who are really in earnest, to "examine if they be in the faith," and "to make their

calling and election sure." The characters pourtrayed in these volumes are set forth to assist in that endeavour. Therein is exhibited, in instances of actual experience, and written by Infinite Wisdom, what it is to come short of the kingdom,—what it is to hold forth to the world, and have the personal discomfort of, a doubtful, compromising testimony,—and what it is, on the contrary, to be established and comforted members of the redeemed family, to feel the work of grace in the heart, to experience its influence in a growing sanctification, to witness a good confession, and, at last, by the power of God to attain through faith unto salvation. In short, *two* considerations shall account for this present undertaking;—*first*, that a real believer is truly a different being from what the world commonly esteems him;—*secondly*, that by far is it better to deal a little over strictly, if that be possible, with our own spirits here, than hereafter at the judgment-seat of Jesus to find ourselves to have been self-deceivers.

Commending, therefore, this feeble effort of enquiry to the gracious acceptance and blessing of the divine Head of the Church, who holds its stars in his right-hand, and walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks, only desiring this—that it may confess his name, to the glory of God the Father;—a powerful extract from a well-known writer of the French school of divinity shall close this prefatory statement:

"Ce n'est pas seulement Tyr et Sidon que je visiterai dans le jour de ma colère, dit le Seigneur, c'est-à-dire, ces pécheurs dont les crimes sembloient

les confondre avec les infidelles et les habitans de Tyr et de Sidon ; je porterai la lumière de mes jugemens jusques dans Jérusalem : c'est-à-dire, j'examinerai, je rechercherai, je sonderai les motifs de ces œuvres saintes, qui sembloient vous égaler aux ames les plus fidelles de la sainte Jérusalem : *Scrutabor Jerusalem in lucernis.* (*Sophon.* 1. 12.)

" Je remonterai jusqu'au premier motif de cette conversion qui fit tant de bruit dans le monde ; et l'on verra si je n'en trouverai pas la source dans quelque dépit secret, dans la décadence de l'âge ou de la fortune, dans les vues secrètes de faveur et d'élévation, plutôt que dans la haine du péché, et dans l'amour de la justice : *Scrutabor Jerusalem in lucernis.*

" J'opposerai ces libéralités répandues dans le sein des pauvres, ces visites de miséricorde, ce zèle pour les entreprises de piété, cette protection accordée à mes serviteurs, avec les complaisances, les désirs d'estime, l'ostentation, les vues humaines qui les ont infectées : et peut-être qu'à mes yeux elles paroîtront plutôt les fruits de l'orgueil, que les suites de la grâce, et l'ouvrage de mon Esprit : *Scrutabor Jerusalem in lucernis.*

" Je rappellerai cette suite de Sacremens, de prières, de pratiques saintes, dont vous aviez fait une sorte d'habitude qui ne réveilloit plus en vous aucun sentiment de foi et de componction ; et vous saurez si la tiédeur, la négligence, le peu de fruit qui les accompagnoit, le peu de disposition qui les précédoit, n'en ont pas fait devant moi autant d'infidélités pour les-

quelles vous serez jugé sans miséricorde: *Scrutabor Jerusalem in lucernis.*

" J'examinerai cet éloignement du monde et des plaisirs, cette singularité de conduite, cette affectation de modestie et de régularité: et peut-être j'y trouverai plus d'humeur, de tempérament et de paresse, que de foi; et que dans une vie plus régulière et plus retirée aux yeux des hommes, vous aurez encore conservé tout l'amour de vous-même, tout l'atttachement à votre corps, toutes les délicatesses de sensualité, et en un mot, tous les penchans des ames les plus mondaines: *Scrutabor Jerusalem in lucernis.*

" J'approfondirai ce zèle prétendu de ma gloire, qui vous faisoit si fort gémir sur les scandales dont vous étiez témoin; qui vous portoit à les condamner avec tant de hauteur et de confiance, et à éclater si vivement contre les déréglemens et les foiblesses de vos frères: et peut-être ce zèle ne sera plus devant moi qu'une dureté de tempérament, une malignité de nature, un penchant de censurer et de médire, une ardeur indiscrète, un zèle d' ostentation et de vanité; et loin de vous trouver zélé pour ma gloire et pour le salut de vos frères, vous ne serez devant moi, qu' injuste, dur, malin et téméraire: *Scrutabor Jerusalem in lucernis.*

" Je vous demanderai compte de ces talens éclatans que vous n' employiez, ce semble, que pour ma gloire, et pour l'instruction des Fidelles, et qui vous avoient attiré les bénédictions des Justes, et les acclamations même des mondains; et peut-être que la complaisance,

la recherche éternelle de vous-même, le désir de l'emporter sur les autres, la sensibilité aux applaudissemens humains, ne laisseront plus voir dans vos œuvres que les œuvres de l' homme et les fruits de l' orgueil ; et que je maudirai ces travaux dont la source avoit toujours été si souillée : *Scrutabor Jerusalem in lucernis.*"

MASSILLON : SERM. SUR LE JUGEMENT UNIVERSEL.

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I.

DISCOURSE INTRODUCTORY.

But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all; and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest: and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.—1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25.

THE great point of Christian doctrine against which the carnal mind has always declared opposition is what the Scripture calls *conversion*:—"the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;"*—"except ye be converted, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God;"†—"he which converteth a sinner shall save a soul from death."‡

If men were merely called upon to receive in the understanding certain abstract truths of Revelation, this they would not object to:—like the monks of former ages, they would write the Bible into manuscript, or learn it by heart from Genesis to Revelation. If they were only called upon to practise certain outward and formal observances, these, however strict and however frequent, they would readily agree to:—they would count their beads, or kiss their crucifix, or tie their tephillim, or read their phylacteries a hundred times a-day. If they were required to make considerable sacrifices of personal property, with this they would also comply, provided it could get them to heaven:—like Simon, they would offer their money for the gift of the Holy Ghost; or like Balak, their thousands of rams, and ten thousand rivers of oil,

* Psa. xix. 7. † Matt. xviii. 3. ‡ James v. 20.

—yea, the fruit of their body for their soul's transgression. If penance and bodily suffering were the way pointed out to them, even to this they would submit themselves:—like the fakirs of the East they would endure the most exquisite tortures; like the worshippers of Baal, they would cry and cut themselves with stones. Yea, it is matter of experience, that many a life of dreary hermitude, and many a painful martyrdom have been undergone with misnomered fervour in lands Christian; and many a human sacrifice in every Pagan region has been offered up,—many a mother forgetting her sucking child to cast it away to the devourer,—thousands of devotees prostrating themselves to the wheels of the idol temple, or mounting the fiery pile:—each of such votaries vainly hoping to make some atonement for iniquity, and after they had traversed the dreadful boundary,

> "To lay their just hands on that golden key
> Which opes the palace of eternity."

But none of these things are what the Lord requireth. They may serve for the "praise of men," who look at the "outward appearance," but "the Lord looketh on the heart." Here it is that the work of conversion must find its place. The heart must be changed, renewed, sanctified, converted. It must be delivered and lifted upward from its fallen, and carnal, and alienated condition. The principle of heavenly love must be implanted and cultivated in it. The desire after God as a reconciled Father in Jesus Christ—the love of holiness—the wish for the heavenly state—must be communicated to it:—"then only shall I be satisfied when I awake up in thy likeness." That wonderful discovery—that total change—must take place in the soul, which the apostle describes as produced in the hearers of the preached word. He speaks of some one, as yet unenlightened, finding his way into the Ecclesia—the worshipping assembly of Christ's believers. He speaks of such an one hearing there what was "prophesied," that is, *preached* to the people. What is the effect of it? The word of the Lord is a polished shaft at his heart,—a hammer that breaketh that marble rock in pieces,—a two-edged sword, dividing asunder the joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions. What is the effect of it? *He is*

convinced of all; he is judged of all; the secrets of his heart are made manifest: and falling down upon his face he worships God: he confesses that God is with his people of a truth.

This is conversion. It is conversion in one of its phases —conversion under the word. It is called, indeed, enthusiasm by the wise and prudent who have not felt and known it; it always was so called, and it always will be. If a man were to tell it now that he went into some church, and that the word of the Lord smote him; and that conviction came to him; and that a great and a gracious change took place in him; so that, as to the state of his heart, he came out of the church an entirely different person from what he was when he entered into it; he would be branded as a hypocrite, or pitied as a self-deceiver. And yet, nevertheless, is not this exactly the circumstance which St. Paul describes? We put it to every upright conscience if it is not: candidly and honestly look at what the apostle says. And this is, moreover, an experience, which, not perhaps in the same mode and suddenness, but as to the change wrought, must personally happen to all men before they can enter into heaven:— "except ye be converted," says Christ himself (whatever conversion be in its scriptural signification—that is the gist of our present enterprize) but "except ye be converted, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." Certainly, therefore, the great point of duty for all that care for their eternal welfare is to enquire very earnestly, *What is conversion?* And as we shall best be enabled to discover the mind of Scripture concerning it by looking at its instances there recorded, it is purposed to examine those instances successively, as they stand on the page of the New Testament. And in conducting that enquiry the following plan will be adopted;

PART I. Certain cases will be separately noticed and considered which, for various prevailing causes, fell short of evangelical conversion: these are accounted *DEFECTIVE CASES:*

PART II. Other examples will be specified of an ambiguous and questionable nature; which are to be reckoned as *DOUBTFUL CASES:*

PART III. The instances will then be taken up, and carefully noted, and applied to diversified experience, wherein those who had been previously in darkness, and without God in the world, were really and savingly converted, and brought into a state of salvation; these, of course, will be *REAL*, and satisfactory *CASES*.

For the present, by way of introduction, it will be well to look at this great and important matter more *generally* and *discursively*. We shall take up the subject in *three* points of view, explaining each in the course of progress:—we shall

I. *Adduce, and look into, general scriptural statement,*

II. *Lament, and account for, comparative actual attainment,*

III. *Propose, and contend for, large attainable improvement.*

I. We begin, *first*, with *bringing forward and examining* the simple, *declaratory statements of the Divine Word.* It is from thence we shall always derive, if we are honest enquirers, all our light and instruction upon every subject, that we may know the Divine mind and the substance of truth respecting it, before we deliberate upon it. Even the Spirit of truth, in his work of enlightening, and sanctifying, and guiding into all truth, uses the Word as the instrument:—"sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth."* To attain, then, to the mind of the Spirit—the sense of Scripture—on this all-important subject, *two* things are needed,—

1. *An explanation of the meaning of the Scriptural term Conversion;* and

2. *A summary of the parallels of Scriptural interpretation.*

1. It will be well to deliberate a little on the *meaning of the term.* It should be mentioned *in limine* that the word *conversion* occurs, indeed, in our English Bibles, computing all its inflections, only thirteen times—five times in the Old

* John xvii. 17.

Testament, eight times in the New. But then the reason of this seldomness is this—that the same word in the original* is rendered in the translation by two different ones. Besides those thirteen places in which it is rendered by the term *conversion*, it is translated in a large number of instances, both in the Old and New Testaments, into the word *to turn*, or *to be turned*:—"turn us, O Lord, and we shall be turned:"—"turn ye, turn ye; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"† In many passages, moreover, the same word is rendered *to return*, or *to cause to return*:—"he openeth their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity;"—"return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee."‡ If, in all these places, the same word had been adopted in the translation, the word *conversion* would have occurred in Scripture one hundred and fifty-six times; and then, perhaps, the importance of such a state—the necessity of such an experience—might have been more forced and impressed upon us. But although the word is different the idea is the same. To be converted is, therefore, in meaning exactly this—to be turned. It is, moreover, to *re*turn, or to be caused to do so. To have the heart converted *is* to have it turned.

Now, by this, it is plainly implied, that the heart which is thus affected is turned or returned *from* something, and turned or returned *to* something. It is returned from something to which it had departed, and which it had loved and coveted; it is returned to something which it has now learned to prefer to its former contentations. And as the way of pursuance, with all its attendant exercises, is essentially different, a new direction is given to such an one, as to all his practices, habits, principles, and prospects.

What is the object, then, which the heart of the uncon-

* O. T. שׁוּב.—N. T. ἐπιστρέπω.

† Psa. lxxx. 3. Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

‡ Job xxxvi. 11. Psa. cxvi. 7. The words are *active*, or *passive*, or *causative*, according to the agency adverted to, whether Divine or human. The *causative* force is more in the original than in the version, being implied in the Hiphel and Huphal forms. The writer apologizes for all this criticism, but the exact sense requires it.

verted so cares for and cleaves to before it experiences conversion? It is the present evil world—the creature—the things of sight: it is selfish gratification, and sinful self-indulgence; it is the three great sins of nature—"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life:" these are its idols—these its cares and occupations.

Mark this progress of sin in its first great exemplification—Cain, and his posterity. Cain "went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod"—the land of *wandering:* here was the act of departure. Cain there builded a city, and called it after his son's name: here was the pride of life. Lamech "took him two wives; and Jubal, the son of one of them, invented musical instruments—the harp, and the tabret, and the viol to be thereafter in the feasts of those who regard not the Lord's operations: in all this we have the lust of the flesh. Tubal, the son of the other wife of Lamech, invented laborious manufactures, in the which men have ever since "risen up early and late taken rest, and eaten the bread of carefulness:" herein was the lust of the eye. And in these three channels of creature-enjoyment and employment was the second principle of sin: the heart departed from God formed its idol in the creature. Then the third act soon follows. God sends his curse on that idol, and makes that creature, judicially, the instrument of moral depravity. The two great overtures of moral turpitude in man's use of the creature are lust and blood-guiltiness: Cain stands forth as the first human murderer; Lamech, besides that iniquity, heads the list as the first adulterer.*

This it is, then, to which the heart of man has turned. It has gone away from the Creator, and then turned to the creature; and that, moreover, in its forbidden and degraded use. "All we," says the prophet, "like sheep have gone astray;" and then—"have turned every one to his own way." Having lost the light of the Divine countenance, men go up and down in the world, saying "who will show us any good?" Having "changed," says the apostle, "the truth of God into

* See Gen. iv. 16—24.

a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, God gave them up to vile affections—gave them over to a reprobate mind."* This is the state of mankind.

But the grace of God, which is by the gospel of Jesus Christ, pursues his wandering creature, and overtakes him in the journey of life, and arrests his career of vanity, and claims his departed affections. Then he is turned from those objects of carnal interest and caused to return to God. From hastening downward to hell in the broad road of destruction, his face is turned Zion-ward, and his purpose God-ward, in the narrow path of salvation. And this is effected by the two great moral levers which work for God in the gospel, and by which it is exactly adapted to be a dispensation to man as a fallen but a voluntary agent. These are the *motive of gratitude* and the *overture of power*. The former is to work in man's heart, when the dying love of the Redeemer is exhibited to his attention, connected with a view of his own undeserving and apostacy. The latter is the strength of the Holy Ghost, purchased by the suffering of Jesus "even for the rebellious,"† that the weakness of the creature might be countervailed by the arm of the Almighty, and his sinful dispositions be subdued in him, and his carnal will be converted.

This is the meaning, then, of the term conversion;—the heart is turned from the creature as its idol and sinful occupation—it is returned, through Divine grace, by the means of the motive of gratitude, through the manifestation of power, to God from whom it had departed. Then the distracted, empty, unsatiated spirit attains to the end it was created for, and finds, in a manifested present God made known through the Manhood Word, the fountain of life and happiness, the treasury of help for its fallen circumstances, the stay of unshaken confidence, and the only indestructible dwelling-place of its permanent, eternal repose.

2. It remains that we add to this view of the proper meaning of conversion a *summary of the parallels of scriptural*

* Is. liii. vi. Psa. iv. 6. Rom. i. 25, 26, 28. † Ps. lxviii. 18.

interpretation. Simple citation shall suffice for it. Conversion is interpreted in Scripture by the following names and emblems. It is called being "born again"—becoming "a new creature"—being "begotten by the word of truth"—being "reconciled to God"—being "brought nigh by the blood of the cross"—"repenting"—"awaking out of sleep"—"turning from dead works to serve the living God"—receiving "a new heart and a new spirit—a heart of flesh instead of" the natural heart—"the heart of stone."* It is described as the becoming "a Jew inwardly by the circumcision of the heart"—as the "being quickened," that is, raised to life, when "dead in sins and trespasses"—as the having "the blind eyes opened," and the deaf ears unstopped to "know the joyful sound"—as the being "foreknown, predestinated, called, justified, and glorified."† Yea, it is represented as the being "risen with Christ"—"sitting with Christ in heavenly places"—having "Christ dwelling in the heart by faith," and "formed within as the hope of glory"—becoming, in fact, a "habitation for God through the Spirit"—that "Spirit to dwell with us, and be in us," and the Father himself and our Lord to "come unto us, and make their abode with us." In short, induction is endless. The same may be said of this, as of the answer of prayer to believers, for in truth they are one,—"exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us."‡

II. Let us come to our *second* particular. Reducing the subject of conversion, as it stands represented in Scripture, to matter of prevalent experience, we have *to lament*, and proposed *to account for*, its *small comparative attainment.* To those who are candid and, at the same time, seriously thoughtful enquirers, who have not accustomed themselves to follow the beaten track of the average order of minds, by receiving principles they know not wherefore, and adopting habits they

* John iii. 3. 2 Cor. v. 17. James i. 18. 2 Cor. v. 20. Eph. ii. 13. Matt. iii. 2. Eph. v. 14. Heb. ix. 14. Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

† Rom. ii. 29. Eph. ii. v. Acts xxvi. 18. Ps. lxxxix. 15. Rom. viii. 30.

‡ Col. iii. 1. Eph. ii. vi. iii. 17. Col. i. 27. Eph. ii. 22. John xiv. 17, 23. Eph. iii. 20.

know not why; but who have made it their practice to take the word of God in its broad, veracious statements, and then to compare it with actual experience in human life surrounding them;—to such it will immediately, on reading the Scripture statements of the greatness of the work of conversion in the ancient times, be matter of notice, and cause of deep lamentation, and subject of earnest enquiry, that it is not so with us now, neither has been for ages. There are, indeed, two sorts of lookers-on upon experience, not, indeed, lookers-into it, situated at opposite extremes, who will dispose of this difficulty in a very summary manner. The bold, enthusiastic, sanguine, but often well-meaning, will tell us there is no real declension, no deterioration of numbers, or powers, or proofs by living epistles, from what was exhibited in the primitive spreading of the Gospel. Such can tell of 'revivals,' which no sober mind can value, because they are often geographically distant from enquiry, and because, when they are nearer, they do not bear examination: the unfledged, ill-taught multitude subside to their former stillness, and the boasted Pentecost ends in universal discouragement. On the other hand, the indolent, phlegmatic, judgment-proud, temporizing labourers in our Lord's vineyard reduce the mountain to a mole-hill with one universal, convenient nostrum for all such rising disquietudes,—'the times are changed.' Monstrous apathy! and, alas! too prevalent in all of us! the selfish idleness of our fallen nature! Is, then, the soul of an immortal less precious in value now than it was some centuries gone? Is the work of salvation gradually losing its worthiness, as every age which passes removes us further from the period when that work was undertaken, and its sufferings borne by the Redeemer? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Is the Lord at the Father's right hand in glory a less prevailing Intercessor? Is the Spirit who governs and guides the Church in any, even the smallest measure, less the "promise of the Father"—less willing and able to speed the labourers of Christ in reaping the world's harvest? Or has our Lord revoked his faithful promise to be with them always in their labours even to the world's termination? God forbid it.

Between these extremes, however, an anxious truth presents itself to the thoughtful, and sober-minded, who make the Scripture their only competent directory. They see, with their eyes open, that real conversion has lost its ground in the world to a most awful extremity, compared with its former progress; that as to numbers it is inconceivably small—that in kind it is painfully degraded; that the Gospel does not, as it once did, nor in a hundredth measure, ride forth conquering and to conquer to the world's evangelization. As for the true Zion, it is "left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city." They see this fact,—they lament it,—and they set themselves, in their minds, to search out and find the cause of it. They know that once there was a time, at the beginning of the career of Christianity, when there "were added in a day to the Church three thousand souls;" and these not merely in numbers, but for continued faithfulness and eminent holy living:—they "continued steadfastly" and "daily,"—"praising God" and living in Christian love. And they know, from the same word, that the consequence of all this fidelity and fervent unanimity was "a daily addition to the Church of such as should be saved."* They know that wherever the apostles came, "multitudes were added to the Church, both of men and women;"†—that Philip "preached Christ at Samaria, and the people with one accord gave heed, and there was great joy in that city;"‡—that Peter "tarried at Joppa, and many believed in the Lord;"§—that from thence he was fetched to Cæsarea, and there "the Holy Ghost fell upon *all* that heard him;"‖ that Paul, and all the apostles, had abundant fruit of their labours, and a door opened of the Lord, at every city they visited;—in short, that wherever the disciples, over and above the apostles,¶ were scattered by Saul's persecution, "preaching the Lord Jesus, the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed, and turned to the Lord."**

Those, we say, who reverence Scripture know all this, and have thought seriously about it; and they turn with a

* Acts ii. 41—47. † v. 14. ‡ viii. 5, 6, 8. § ix. 42, 43.
‖ x. 44. ¶ viii. 1. ** xi. 20, 21.

sorrowful spirit to the contrast of all these things—to the lack of these manifestations—in these latter days; and they ask with an anxious carefulness,—what is the cause to be assigned for it?

It may be permitted to the author of these discourses, not intending to dwell on this view of the subject in the after parts of this work, to specify to his brethren what he feels persuaded are the two great proximate causes of all this deadness in the Church's work among the nations. The Church of Christ in the present times is undeniably lacking the two great marks which the Lord and Saviour prescribed it, as its means of evangelization. These are its *oneness*, and, therefore, its *visibility*. And the lack of these two indicatives, which are its appointed weapons for warfare with sin, and the Devil, and an evil world, leaves it without its armour, and forms two potent and radical causes of its want of enlargement and prosperity.

"By this," said the Lord Jesus, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* And so he prays to the Father for "all that should ever believe through the word" of his apostles, "that they *all may be one*, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me:—and again,—"that they may be made perfect *in one*, that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them."† Surely men have not considered this heart's desire of their Lord for the unity of his believers, with an earnestness of attention, and followed by effort to attain it, due to his great anxiety! Three times he prayed to the Father, in the time of his greatest pressure, to take that cup from him; but five times he prayed, in that one prayer for his people, that they all might be *one*; and that, moreover, even with the same oneness, wherewith himself is one with the Father.

And then, the Church's oneness constitutes its *visibility*. Then the ungodly world can see it, and have its living witness before them, and view the banners of the cross, in all their immortal glory, unfurled upon the towers thereof. Then it

* John xiii. 35. † xvii. 20, 23.

condemns the world with one accumulated testimony. Then it is "a city"—not cities many—"set upon a hill, and which cannot be hidden." Then it is "a light upon a candlestick," and therefore "giveth light to all that are in the house." Then it is "the mountain of the Lord's house exalted on the top of the hills," and therefore "all nations flow unto it." And then, moreover, it reaps, in its own self, an infinite harvest of blessings, worth any one's while to enumerate as they stand on the face of Scripture, which are peculiarly appended to the state of evangelical communion. Applying and using its manifold gifts together, its members at length "all come in the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto one perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; and speaking the truth in love, grow up into Christ in all things; from whom as the Head the whole body *fitly joined together* and compacted by that *which every joint supplieth*, according to the effectual working in the *measure of every part*, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."*

III. The author is of opinion, and throws forth the sentiment for wiser and better than himself to canvass it, that never will the Church of the Lord and Saviour go forth to convert the nations in its pristine legitimate glory, until it rises up before all the world as *one visible* body, with the motto of Christ upon its banners—that *its members all* "*love one another.*" He believes, too, that now is the time, when division has swelled to the full, for the faithful to make their effort, and seek for unity; and that to labour for this attainment is at present of far greater moment, and of much more permanent bearing on the truth's final triumph, than even the efforts which are making (alas! how rent and divided!) for printing that truth in all languages, and speaking it through the world. With this view he asks for indulgence to the *third*, and more difficult topic, viz. the *proposing*, and *contending for*, *some great attainable improvement.*

God only knows,—but *was the separative principle, in the practical details of the Reformation, really, inevitably called*

* Eph. iii. 16.

for? Certainly with all its advantages, in giving the key of knowledge, and taking the Devil's extinguisher off from the candle of the Lord, it has, nevertheless, been the womb of an infinite family of schisms—of rendings, and novelties, and separate bodies of religionists, as numerous now as pride and ingenuity can make them. None can shut their eyes to the fact, who have read those events with attention, that there was a most lamentable mixture of human temper and vexation at the bottom of all those doings. Would it not have been possible, instead of forsaking the vessel and letting it fall to pieces, to have set all hands to the pump, and to have joined one effort to repair it? Might it not have been an end attainable, by a spirit of love and forbearance, by patient waiting and holy living and remonstrance, chiefly of all by prayer to the Living Head, still to have kept, in its proper purity and loveliness, that most covetable title of one united body, divided only by seas and kingdom boundaries—'the Holy Catholic Church?' so that its only variations should be its geographical limits;—the "church at Philippi," —the "church at Ephesus"—the "church at Rome"—the church in England, India, or Otaheite,—but all, collectively, throughout the earth, 'the Holy Catholic Church.'

This may startle. Educational prejudices are strong and deeply rooted. But it is only, hitherto, a question. And, one more query shall now be added. Could there not *be achieved such a thing, even now, as a kind of general harmony?* If this is, at once, because of its vastness, shrunk from if applied to Christendom at large, (but even this—why not?)—with a view to embrace in the arms of long broken fellowship even that sinning church which now for so many centuries has filled the courts of the Lord with folly,—thus, however, called to rise up from her carnal degradation, and at once to annul those vain traditions and mummeries of which so many of her priesthood are now entirely ashamed:—but if this be despaired of (though ought it not to be attempted?) then, at least, is it not attainable to take our land as the limit, and to use and negotiate some general discussion and arrangement, for the reconciliation of divided members of Christ, and, by mutual Scriptural concession, in the spirit of brotherly love,

(for in all there wanteth not infirmity, but in all there wanteth not wisdom, truth, and charity,) to bring the disjected members into one incorporation—thereafter the visible, one body of Jesus, set forth to the marvel, example, and condemnation of the whole ungodly world?

This is a distant vista. Most may consider it Utopian. Some may think it not needed. But all must grant this—that it must then, at least, be the case with us, whenever that period reaches us which men call Millennium—the days of the Church's final blessedness—the adopting of the body—the manifestation of the sons of God. Will they not then be one church? will they not then be one body, and one adopted family? Mountains of difficulty may be placed in the way of this attainment, which may make it a lingering work, but it ought to be attempted.

The author's idea is this. Amongst our numerous Societies, let others be set on foot called 'Union Associations,' or 'Societies for the Furtherance of Religious Unity;'—or such like. Let the purpose of such Societies be to sound the depths,—to feel the pulse of the public mind,—to beat up the oil and water of men's discordant opinions, and try if they will not mix,—to put all pious intellect under their requisition, sanctifying it with abundant prayer, with a view to discover some latent method for combining conflictive principles, for devising some practicable thoroughfare through the dark and trackless wilderness. The aggregate result of those preliminary measures shall bring the matter to an issue, and decide its attainability. Then we may yet appropriate that strain of the royal Psalmist, "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded his blessing, even life for evermore."

Some, indeed, who heed not the lamentable evil of division, looking at it theoretically, (forgetting that schism is one

of the "works of the flesh,"*) and, from want of means of observation, being ignorant, practically, of the large extent of its injuriousness, may think this of minor moment. Others may so far extend the principle of Christian benevolence as to persuade themselves into a belief that the line of partition is merely in outward forms, while there is unity at heart. But let such persons descend from this bird's-eye view of the whole machinery *en masse*, and let them look a little closely into the practical details; let them turn to our village populations, where man is known to his neighbour, and where the professing church, either as one community, or by its members individually, is direct before the eyes of the ungodly; and there they shall see the lamentable evils of division. There they shall see the most faithful pastoral vigilance traduced, susurrously thwarted, and almost nullified by bigoted party-spirit. There they shall meet with repeated instances of persons who have listened to the gospel faithfully preached to them and been brought under serious impressions; but soon they have been beset; and in the midst of their babedom in Christ, and nursling state of experience, for which a humble watchfulness would have been far better, they are flattered into the persuasion of their having some eminent gifts—some notable precosity of graces,—and are induced to make public exhibition in prayer or telling of experience, till at last they are taken in Satan's snare, their knowledge becomes vain, it loses the sanctifying principle, pride gets hold of the heart, and their very religion becomes iniquity. And then the effect of all this will also be very apparent to every close observer—that thus the ungodly are hardened,—they see the strife and rejoice in it; they mark, and rely on, the inconsistency; they make such things their own strong-hold of apology; the Lord is thus wounded in the house of his friends and servants; and evil of every kind is increased and strengthened by the means of righteousness.

One only consolation there is, in looking at the present distressing state of religion, and to this we recur as our refuge;—there is, in the highest heaven, a Faithful, Eternal Deliverer, whose eye, with respect to his Israel here on earth

* 1 Cor. iii. 3.

never slumbers nor sleeps; and who is not only strong to redeem it, but also, as a part of his covenant character towards it, will prove himself just to visit it, and wise and gracious to refine it from all its manifold defilements. He "sits as a Refiner to the house of Levi," and is like the "refiner's fire, or as fullers' sope." Lord of glory! look at length upon thy people, and come, and visit them! Bow the heavens and come down! Stir up thy strength and come amongst us! Touch the mountains and they shall smoke! Raise up a faithful company to pray for the *peace* of thy Jerusalem, and to strive, by thy Spirit's direction, to make it a city at unity in itself, and never to cease their labours till "Ephraim shall no more envy Judah, nor Judah vex Ephraim;" till, as we have "one Lord, and one God and Father of all," there may be also "one body, one faith, one baptism, one spirit of unity kept in the bond of peace, and one hope of our calling!"

Then, and, it may be feared, not till then, the Church shall go forth with power, as it did in the primitive time, to the conversion of all nations, and the effective preaching of the Gospel to every creature. Then shall the spiritual Zion be the joy of the whole earth. A more large and abundant measure of the gifts of the Holy Ghost may be expected to descend. That Living Unction and Comforter, no longer grieved by dissensions and provoked to withdraw from minds unfitted to receive him, shall dwell, in more evident proof, with the Lord's believers individually, and in their aggregate community. In fact, the Church so called shall be the Church in divine reality. Its sun shall no more go down, the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb shall be its everlasting light, its walls shall be called Salvation, and its gates shall no more be shut, day nor night, till all the nations and kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honour into it. FIAT! JEHOVAH! ADVENIAT REGNUM TUUM!

SERMON II.

PART I.

CLASS I. DEFECT IN PRINCIPLE. SECTION I.

SIMON THE SORCERER.*

Then Simon himself believed also; and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered.
But Peter said unto him, Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter; for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.—For I perceive, that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Acts viii. part of ver. 13 and 20, and ver. 21, 23.

OUR Work commences, according to the plan which was specified in the foregoing Introductory Discourse, with a notice, for the First Part, of those instances recorded in the New Testament, which proved DEFECTIVE CASES, in respect of evangelical conversion. I must state in the outset of this part of the enquiry, as the rule or basis on which it will be conducted, that there are *five* different ways, more nor less, in which a character that is brought at all under the influence of Divine Truth may still, nevertheless, sooner or later, prove defective;—and that there are *eight* particular cases, of which we may speak with certainty that they were defective, and which all of them

* The reader will give indulgence that the following papers should appear, as they were first given birth to, in the addressive and hortatory form.

plainly arrange themselves, as we shall see in the sequel, under those *five* classes of defectiveness, and illustrate and exemplify them; viz.

CLASS I. Defect in *principle*,
CLASS II. Defect in *practice*,
CLASS III. Defect in *impression*,
CLASS IV. Defect in *degree*,
CLASS V. Defect in *continuance*.

The examples will show, as we proceed, the nature of each of these defects, and the mode of its operation. We begin our course of enquiry with

CLASS I. Defectiveness in *principle*.

By this I mean, (what all will at once acknowledge to be an obvious hindrance to the work of God's grace upon the soul,) the outward profession of the faith from corrupt and carnal motives, without a corresponding influence or an inward work: the passing to the world for a changed, converted person, while inwardly carnal and unsanctified. Of such it will be obvious, as well as of the next of these classes—those who indulge in sinful *practice*, that however they may flatter themselves, or pass deceit upon others, they are not of the faithful people. Of the defectiveness of principle—passing for saints while still ungodly sinners, there are *two* special instances recorded.

The first is the case of Simon Magus. He, the text tells us, "believed." He was "baptized" into the visible Church of Christ. He "continued" with Philip. And he "wondered." He desired to possess "the gift of the Holy Ghost." He, at his last extremity, desired the apostles to "pray for" him. And yet, at the same time, hear the strong language—the decisive sentence—which St. Peter spoke to him: "thou hast no part nor lot in this matter; thy heart is not right with God; thou art in the gall of bitter-

ness, and in the bond of iniquity." Let us, then, enquire, in this discourse, how this came to pass; where was the great deficiency which proved him false and deceitful? I shall take the points of his history just as they stand, and make some remarks upon them.

He is thus introduced to our notice.—Philip, one of the seven deacons, fleeing from the persecution of Saul, after Stephen's death, came to Samaria. There he preached Christ. It pleased God to give an abundant blessing. The people with one accord gave heed to the preached word. Great miracles were performed, and the unclean spirits driven out; and the city was filled with great joy. Amongst the inhabitants of the city was this man Simon. He was a person whom all the city looked up to;—"they all," it is said, "gave heed to him from the least to the greatest:" they said of him, "this man is the great power of God." He had gotten this great name by using sorcery: that is to say, by being what is called a magician—an enchanter; we say not whether really so, or pretendedly; we meddle not now with the question whether there was in those days such a thing as magic or not. But however, he passed for a magician, and had bewitched the people; he had made himself the wonder and the dread of every one, and even the object of their religious adoration. Irenæus, who lived soon after, tells us that he gave himself out to be God the Father.* Justin Martyr tells us that the people worshipped him as the Ancient Deity.† And afterwards when he could not obtain the Spirit from the apostles, he announced himself to be the Holy Ghost. And so the Scripture here tells us, that he "gave himself out to be some great one;" and that the people said of him that he was the "great power of God."

I. Now then, consider here, in the *first* place, the

* Iren. b. 1. c. 20. p. 115. † Apol. ii. p. 69.

secret of his deficiency although outwardly joining the Church—the great and important reason why this unhappy person received the truth deceitfully, and never was able to become by it truly converted. He was plainly a person whose strong prevailing character of natural disposition was to *exalt and magnify himself.* The defective principle of self—the self-sufficiency of the natural, carnal mind—ruled and reigned in him, as the motive of all his conduct, and its gratification the end he was always seeking. His heart was filled with the most self-idolatrous, the most ungovernable pride; and, as we shall see in the course of his history, this was the secret bane which corrupted all that he did, and was strongly manifested in his whole character, and which turned into poison and destruction against him the most gracious means and opportunities which the goodness of God could bestow upon him.

Before the preached Gospel came into the city, he had all the people at disposal. He was the great supreme among them, and all men feared and bowed down before him: this was all that he desired. When the Gospel of the Lord and Saviour came with the power of God amongst them, and multitudes were converted, because the Lord would have mercy upon them, what does he do? What should such an one do with respect to such a doctrine as the blessed Gospel of Jesus? The idol of self was enthroned in his heart, and worshipped by all around him, and how shall he tear it down to exalt the Saviour in its room? Mark the issue. He "believed:"—he was "baptized;"—he "continued:"—he continued with Philip, hearing his word, and seeing his miracles; and he "wondered." The great and mighty magician, who gave himself out to be God himself, now became joined by outward fellowship to the sanctified Church of the Lord Jesus. But was it as a humble, penitent disciple? Surely not. How, then, was it?—as a devil

transformed into an angel of light;—as a wolf amongst the sheep of the Saviour's pasture;—as a monster of pride and subtlety, in the midst of those who, by the work of the Spirit upon them, were meek and lowly, and self-denying, and filled with the love of God and of men, and separated to holiness from all the contaminations of an evil, wicked world. And what was the motive by which he was actuated? It was that still he might magnify himself amongst the people and serve himself upon them.

The preached doctrine of the Gospel was drawing the people from his enchantments. He saw it was confirmed by plain undeniable miracles. And he believed, and was baptized, and joined himself among them, that as he could not any longer be great and magnified against the Church, he might be great and magnified within it. And therefore, when he saw that by the laying on of hands the Holy Ghost was given to the disciples, he offered money to the apostles to bestow the gift upon him likewise. He desired, it is true, to receive the Holy Ghost. But wherefore did he desire it? Was it for his gracious, sanctifying influence to turn his heart to the Lord, and to work the change of regenerating grace within him? Surely not:—it was not the inward work of the Spirit, but his miraculous gifts which he sought for. Did he wish for those miraculous gifts, then, to serve the cause of God in the world, and to bring honour to Christ? His aim was to display the same power as a believer, by the Spirit of God, which he did before as an unbeliever, perhaps by the spirit of the devil. "Give me also this power," says he:—but for what? —that I may be useful to the souls of men?—that I may glorify the Lord who has redeemed me?—that I may help his servants and apostles in their high vocation?—nay rather, but "give me this power," just for myself, and for my own display; just

for the gratifying of my carnal vanity:— "give me this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Then it was that St. Peter said to him—"thy money perish with thee; thy heart is not right in the sight of God:"—thy heart is not right, for this reason—thou art not seeking the honour and glory of Christ, but the honour and glory of thyself.

Here therefore, we contend, is one very great, and certainly not unfrequent, reason why the souls of outward, visible disciples are not, in the end and issue, inwardly converted, but go out at last from the Church because they are not of it. Their first embracing of religion, and their subsequent use of it, is a great deal too much a selfish thing. Self is still seated on the throne of conduct, just as much now within the Church and its received doctrines, as it was before without it.

If any have true religion, true religion is a humble, gracious, philanthropic, self-denying, not self-magnifying thing. It is not a spirit of self-sufficiency, but a desire imparted to the soul to live unto Him who hath died for us and rose again. It seeks the glory of Jesus Christ. It desires to spread the knowledge of his salvation, and to exalt his dignity and glory. It is not a self-seeking spirit, but a spirit of love—love to God, and to the souls of men. Therefore, if any experience that religion has not brought them to this,—that grace has not done this for them—to such also it may be said—your heart is not right with God. If you are loving your own self, and not the souls of your fellow men; if the natural pride of your heart is not really humbled; if you are wise or great in your own esteem; if you still cling to your former feelings, though perhaps in some new and religious manner; if you seek to be thought of, or looked at, or considered,

for your knowledge, your gifts, your graces, your talents, your alms, or your prayers;—this sort of feeling cometh not of the Lord:—it is the old deceitful nature, though changed in its outward garb, though wearing a penitent's sackcloth, instead of a worldling's purple robe. Still it is all defilement. Pride is still the sin, and self the idol. And therefore you know and feel, that your heart is not right with God;—that is to say, you do not in genuine simplicity and godly sincerity desire to serve and worship him, to humble self, and to exalt and magnify the dying love of the Redeemer. O! it is a great and precious gift, a cause of the deepest thankfulness, to be kept from such fatal self-deception; and however little be the outward profession we make of our Master's service, to know, with a good and a healthy conscience, that by the grace he has given us it is sincere; it is affectionate; it is not as a selfish Pharisee, but as a contrite sinner! O! let us each of us seek for more of that spirit, "Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of?" Let man be nothing, let self be nothing, but let God in Christ Jesus be all in all.

II. Well, but *secondly* consider, nevertheless, respecting this false disciple, *the act of his joining the Church.* This man, it is said, did believe. He was baptized. He did continue with Philip. He actually became, and for a long time continued to be, a member of the visible Church. And yet we know from the inspired apostle that he had no part or lot in the matter. How easy a thing then, how insufficient a thing is external discipleship! The most corrupt and carnal purpose had been the principal moving cause to bring this man to enrol his name amongst the people of Jesus Christ, to company with them, to continue with his minister, and no doubt to sit with them at his sacramental table.

Is it said that he believed? Then believing—just believing—is not being finally saved. Is it said that he was baptized, and yet remained without part or lot in the matter! What, then, becomes of that dangerous doctrine now too commonly preached, by some even spiritual men, that let a child be but once baptized into the national church, and each and every such child is made effectually regenerate? Did he continue for some considerable time amongst the people of the Lord? Then some, after long profession, may, nevertheless, be discovered to be unsound and deceived disciples,—some may still fall away,—some may return like the dog to his vomit, or the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire! Then being joined for some length of time to this or that sect of Christians, is not being faithful unto death,—is not receiving the crown of life. And when we see such a vain ungodly person as this Samaritan sorcerer so lightly and heedlessly joining himself to the Church, are we not reminded how great is the guilt of those whom we see around us, who will force, and hurry and compel the half-enlightened, or perhaps not at all enlightened, certainly unsanctified hearer, to enrol his name or her name amongst them; and win that consent by giving them place, and office, and opportunity of self-sufficient exercise, just that they may number the people, no matter how at the last they leave them, make their shipwreck of faith, and become irretrievably alienated from true religion?

III. Observe, however, in the *third* place, of this remarkable person, when he had thus joined the Church, *his subsequent conduct in it.* When he was thus baptized and followed about with the saints, what is it said that he did? Just what it might be expected a false disciple would do, yea and commonly does: he "*wondered.*" This was the utmost he was able to attain to. He could not participate in their devotional

enjoyments, or their evangelical employments; but he watched and wondered. He could not understand the truth which they preached, or the beauty of the system which they believed and trusted in; but he heard their doctrine and wondered. He saw their holy example and still he wondered. He observed their miracles and he wondered still.

And what a picture is this of many an outward worshipper, many a formal disciple now! If you are found at this time, my friends, amongst the professing people of Jesus Christ, without a real evangelical possession of his saving truth in your heart, then is not this just your case? The things which you hear and see you cannot enter into, love, understand, or enjoy. But you listen; you are spectators; and you wonder what it is that you hear and see. You know that you have not that inward, comfortable, joyful realization, which you evidently see to be imparted and sent from the living Head of his Church to his true and seeking and faithful saints.

IV. But now notwithstanding all this outward profession of this deceitful and deceived disciple, mark *the end that it came to.* The apostle of Jesus Christ refused, in the way of sentence, to bestow at the last upon him the blessed gift of the Holy Ghost. He did not seek it in the right, the appointed way, and therefore it was not given him. He was left as he was in the flesh, notwithstanding his believing, his baptism, continuing with Philip, and wondering, carnal and sensual and earthly still.

Now this is the point to which I wish to bring this discourse. If any of you, my brethren, have reason to feel and lament that yours is the state which has been described, *a defective principle in first receiving the truth as it is in Jesus:*—Then you see from the

end of this once professing disciple, that it is a lamentable sign that you are not yet partakers of that great and important work, the work of spiritual conversion; that work of which it is said, that except it take place in you, you cannot enter into heaven.

Now then do not lightly consider this. And when you have considered it, if the witness is against you, do not slight or forget it. Do not endeavour to shake that witness from you. What do we ask you to do then? We ask you to seek for this gift of the Holy Ghost, not indeed as Simon sought for it as if it could be purchased with money, as if all that you have, as if all the world would be worth one day's possession of it; but to seek it, as Peter declared he should have done, to seek for the Spirit as the "gift of God." If your heart is not right with God at present; if you must feel and confess that such is the case; then seek for the work and the grace of that Spirit to effect it, which is promised to believers as the gift of God.

V. Well then *fifthly*, with a view to *conclusion*, let us *reduce this subject to a question of proof and evidence;* what must we say that it is, to have *the heart not right with God?* Let us endeavour to define it with some particularity. And not to enlarge the enquiry, I shall confine my thoughts to the marks that are given of it in the character before us. They are *four* in number.

1. In the *first* place, the heart of any person is not right in the sight of God, where there *is not an evangelical view.* That is to say, where there is not a right knowledge of the gift of salvation, which God in Christ Jesus has given to the world, and a cordial affectionate embracing of it. To how many formal worshippers that are bringing like Simon their money*

* Ver. 18, 20.

in their hands, their works, and offerings, and obedience, may we justly apply what was said by the Lord to the woman of Samaria "If thou hadst known the gift of God, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water!"

There must be this knowledge to have the heart right with God. You must see salvation to be gracious, rich, and free. You must behold in Jesus Christ the Father's unspeakable gift. You must cordially receive and embrace the salvation which is in him. You must desire to come to Jesus Christ not from earthly and carnal causes, not from corrupt and selfish motives, not because you see others do so, and you wish to resemble them, not from a sense of duty, not from a formal compliance. But how must you desire to come to him? As a lost and ruined sinner, seeing yourself, feeling yourself to be so; feeling the need of his atonement, and of the gift and grace of his Spirit: desiring to be sanctified by his resurrection, and washed and cleansed by his precious blood.

2. Then, *secondly*, no heart can be said to be right with God, where there is *not a good conscience*, a faithful upright sincerity; an honest principle in divine things. You must not be able to feel with Simon, that you are joining in the fellowship of saints, while you are earthly and carnal still;* so that you cannot enter into the spirit and power of their services, nor enjoy the employments which they enjoy. But rather, you must have the honest testimony of your conscience that the service of Christ is perfect freedom. That his Word is better to you than thousands of gold and silver. And that not just in public, but in your private hours, you are diligently and perseveringly seeking and finding the throne of grace.

* Ver. 21.

3. *Thirdly:* The heart is never right before God, wherever there is *not a renewed nature*, a spiritual, holy mind. You must not like Simon be seeking to possess the blessed gift of Jehovah's Spirit, while still like him you remain in the "bonds of your iniquities."* What is the fellowship of Christ with Belial, or of dark with light? Beloved, there must not be found in your walk and practice any indulgence of sin. Be sure that if there is, never will the Spirit of Jehovah make his abode within you. You must lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset you. You must have the inward witness that you are not carnal now, but spiritual. That sin, though it harasses, does not overcome you. That your affections are not set any more upon the earth, but raised and elevated to the things above.

4. And then *lastly:* The heart is not right with God, *except there be a meek and a gracious disposition;* the disposition of saints. Not like Simon, a selfish purpose, a proud, self-seeking mind;† wishing for the Spirit of the Lord for vain and carnal ostentation. But desiring rather to possess that blessed gift in order to form and sanctify your character into the gracious character of Christ himself. To be meek and lowly in heart like him. To be filled with love to God and to man like him. To be gentle, and patient, and forgiving like him. To be like he was, desiring and praying for the Father's glory, and the calling and saving of immortal souls.

VI. Now then *finally*, applying these tests of evidence, let the subject, according to the several results of them, *lead to appropriate decisions.*

1. Beloved, brethren if these tests of evidence pronounce in your favour, then this, by the power of

* Ver. 23. † Ver. 19, 24.

heavenly grace, is to have the heart to be right with God. Is this the way in which you have received and learned Christ? Have you been enabled to flee for refuge through a personal need of pardon to his bloody sacrifice? Have you in honest faithfulness had power to receive him in the likeness of his death and in the likeness of his resurrection? Is it now your sincere desire to have the disposition of his saints, to live by faith on his name; to walk with him in newness of life; and so whether living or dying to wait for his kingdom, and his glorious appearing at the end of time?

Then if this is the case, notwithstanding all your remaining imperfections, your heart in the main is right with God. God is at peace with you, and you are reconciled to God. You have experienced not a defective but a real conversion to his name. You have only to continue, to hold the truth you have received, and to live by faith upon it. Thus your knowledge will increase. Your character will be gradually more conformed to the character of Christ. You will grow continually in grace and assurance, and come at the last to eternal life in heaven.

2. But if you must say, as perhaps you must, that this is *not* your state and your experience; that you have good reason to be well convinced that your heart is not right with God; that however you company with the redeemed family and stand in your place among them, yet you are secretly convinced that you do not in real sincerity belong to their blessed number:—Then brethren, what shall we ask of you? Do not shut your eyes to that solemn, that awful fact, and just hold on as you are in the outward visible Church. Do not cover or conceal it from your personal knowledge even in part and measure. Do not try to forget it, or to drown its witness in earthly cares.

But meet it at once in all the distress involved in it, in all the warning that it gives you, in all the demands that it makes upon you. And now be persuaded to fall at once before the Lord and to ask his forgiveness; to ask him to return to you again:—to ask him, by an act of his sovereign grace, still to cleanse, and to change, to convert, and to sanctify your soul. Do what Simon was commanded to do, but which it does not seem that he did, beseech of the Lord that your former thoughts "may be forgiven" you.* Seek, as he was reminded, and seek with assurance of success, seek for the Holy Ghost, not as a purchase or a merit of man, but as a promise and a gift of God. From him cometh down every good and perfect gift, and, no respecter of persons, he giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not. We leave one passage with you; one of the names of the Holy Ghost in Scripture: (Acts i. 4.) "The promise of the Father" which saith Christ you "have heard of me."

* Ver. 22.

SERMON III.

CLASS I. DEFECT IN PRINCIPLE. SECTION II.

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA.

"*How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?*" Acts v. part of ver. 9.

THE great secret of happiness and comfort in religion is to have what the Scripture calls *a good conscience.*

It is to be brought through divine grace to this state of mind:—that it is the sincere and honest desire of the heart, to be all that a person professes to be as a Christian believer, to have a really spiritual mind, to walk uprightly, to live innocently, and conscientiously, and to deal faithfully with God. So that we can find in ourselves as believers, all those marks of a good conscience which the Scripture speaks of: "a conscience void of offence towards God and man:" a "conscience purged from dead works," "a conscience in all things willing to live honestly:" "a conscience that answers towards God:" "a conscience bearing us witness in the Holy Ghost."* In proportion as a person is enabled by Divine grace to have such a conscience, he finds happiness and comfort in seeking God. And in proportion as he loses it, and becomes secretly uncon-

* Acts xxiv. 16. Heb. ix. 14.—xiii. 18. 1 Pet. iii. 21. Rom. ix. 1.

scientious, he gradually loses that comfort, loses his hold upon religion, loses its relish and enjoyment, darkens his spiritual vision, weakens his faith, kills the principle of spiritual life in his soul, and wanders away from God and goodness.

It is true that the grace of God in the Gospel by which a sinner is saved, is a free provision for man as a sinner, as lost and guilty and unclean. It is true that our hope and dependance is only to rest on that provision of grace, and not on our own uprightness; that our comfort is all to be drawn from that and not from ourselves. But nevertheless, unless we have a good conscience, that provision of grace, and therefore the comfort and peace which it offers us, will be utterly in vain to us, and lost completely upon us. And this for two reasons. 1. *First*, because it is a part of this provision of grace, to *give us* such a conscience; to purge and cleanse us from the old deceitful leaven; to make our heart right with God, that we may wash our hands in innocency, and so come to his altar. And if therefore this is not done in us, if still we are unconscientious, then certainly we have not the evidence, that the grace of God in the Gospel has yet been received by us, or has yet done any thing for us. 2. And then, *secondly*, we cannot have the comfort of that provision of grace, unless we have a good conscience, because without such a conscience we cannot *apprehend it, or keep our hold upon it.* For it is by this, St. Paul tells us, that we hold the mystery of the faith, and by the lack of it that we lose it: "Holding the mystery of the faith" says he "in a pure conscience; which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck."*

In short, brethren, all the comforts of true religion are inbound and interwoven with such a state of

* 1 Tim. iii. 9.—i. 19.

mind. By it we "draw near, and in full assurance of faith:" In its "testimony," St. Paul says "he had his rejoicing:" And the Lord who desireth truth in the inward parts has promised and declared, That "no good thing will he withhold of grace or glory from them that walk uprightly."* But on the contrary, if persons lose such a conscience by unconscientiousness and secret sin, then these are the evils which the Scripture pronounces to come upon them. When they put away a pure conscience, it is said, they "make shipwreck of faith." When, as it is written of the Cretans, their mind and conscience is defiled, then it is said, "nothing is pure to them:" "They profess to know God, but in works deny him, being abominable, disobedient, and to every good work reprobate." And when finally their conscience is seared as with a hot iron, then it is declared, they are "led by seducing spirits, speaking lies in hypocricy:—and a strong delusion is upon them, to believe a lie, that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."†

Now we have, in this chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, another of these affecting instances, besides that of Simon which we have noticed before, of the deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, and of the awful end to which it comes. It is the case of Ananias, and his wife Sapphira. They wanted this upright conscience. They had forced themselves in amongst the spiritual followers of Christ, without the wedding garment of a sound profession upon them. They were deceiving his Church. They dealt untruly with his faithful ministers. They agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord. They lied to the Holy Ghost. And they were made a solemn example to all disciples of the just displeasure of Al-

* Heb. x. 22. 2 Cor. i. 12. Psalm lxxxiv. 11.
† 1 Tim. i. 19. Tit. i. 15, 1 Tim. iv. 1, 2. 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.

mighty God. In the midst of the whole assembly their secret guilt was exposed and detected, and they fell down dead at the apostles' feet.

In making then the account of these two disciples the subject of this discourse, I shall have one object in view. It is to impress on our minds this conviction: That where there is allowed unconscientiousness in those who profess the religion of Jesus Christ, then there is imminent danger of its bringing the wrath of the Lord upon them, and, if it is not speedily repented of, of their finally falling away. Wherever it exists in the mind of professors of religion, it fairly authorizes the self-suspicion, that the original principle upon which the truth has been received by them is the defective principle we speak of, falling short of evangelical conversion; the result of external circumstances and not the work of the Holy Ghost.

Now concerning this habit of unconscientiousness, which there sometimes is in professed believers, we learn from the case of Ananias and Sapphira three things:—

I. *The motives which commonly lead to it.*
II. *The peculiarity of guilt which there is in it.*
III. *And the necessity and therefore the certainty that the Lord will visit it.*

I. *First,* we learn from this account, *the causes which commonly lead to falseness and unconscientiousness,* in those professors of religion whose heart is not right with God. They are chiefly *three* in number. That is to say, 1. There is a cause of such conduct which has reference to *others.* 2. There is a cause which has reference to *themselves.* 3. And, there is a cause which has reference to *God.*

1. In the *first* place, when persons are sometimes found in the Church of Christ, who are deceiving that church by a false and unsound profession, one of the causes which leads them to do so, is a cause which has reference to *others*. It is *spiritual pride*. It is loving the praise of men more than the praise of God.*

The apostles, at the time when this circumstance happened, were receiving the contributions of the saints. It was a time of great unity in the Christian Church. The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul. They had all things common, and a common purse was made for them. Many that had lands and houses, sold their possessions and laid the price of them at the apostles' feet.

Amongst those who did this, two are particularly mentioned; Barnabas and Ananias. And they serve to show us, how the very same act may be done upon two very differeut principles, and for two very different ends. Suppose that we had been amongst the by-standers, and had seen both of them come, Barnabas and Ananias, with their money in their hand, and lay it before the apostles. How could we have made a distinction between them? We must have given both of them credit for disinterested benevolence and self-denial and a spirit of Christian love. And yet Barnabas did it for love: Ananias, for pride and ostentation. Barnabas we are afterwards told, "rejoiced"† at Antioch, at the work of God that was done by others: Ananias was only careful to magnify himself, and to publish his own liberality. Barnabas, we are told was a "good man, and full of the Holy Ghost:" Ananias sinned against him: he lied to the Holy Ghost: he agreed with his wife to tempt the

* John v. 44.—xii. 43. † Acts xi. 23. Gr. ἐχάρη.

Spirit of the Lord." In short the very same act, although it was outwardly a gift of charity, and although it was pecuniarly useful to the Church, in Barnabas it was an act of faith and devotion; in Ananias and Sapphira it was an act of sin.

My dear brethren, let this lead us to self-examination. Let us look iuto ourselves upon this particular principle, that God knoweth our hearts, and that that which is highly esteemed among men may be after all abomination with Him; that however we seek to justify ourselves before others, yet while man looketh only on the outward appearance, the Lord looketh on the heart. All that is there in secret is naked and open unto him with whom we have to do. Our Lord now sitteth on the throne, as the Head and Ruler of his Church; and his eyes are upon it as a flame of fire. He can say to every one of its branches, and to each individual member, as much as he did in the ancient time;—"I know thy works."

Examine, then, brethren, the motives of conduct from which your devotional habits and religious practices proceed; your prayers, your charities, your duties, and the conduct of life. Is there more than a form of words? Is there more than the outward act? Is the heart engaged in it? Does it spring from a gracious principle within you? Or is it done like the Pharisees to be seen of men? Try it by this;—Is it a pleasing exercise to do these things in secret? Do you pray in secret, more than in the synagogues of the people? Do you give your alms in secret, and for Christ's sake, and not for your own? Do you maintain in all your duties and conduct a secret intercourse with God through the Mediator, a desire to manifest your love to him, and a constant reference to his will as your rule of life? It cannot be too much remembered, that if these things are not of faith, then

there is only one alternative, "whatsoever is not of faith is of sin:"* it is not a neutral or indifferent matter, but it is positive, actual sin. The unfelt and unmeaning prayer, the formal devotion, the ostentatious charity, the outward duty, is not of faith, and therefore it is of sin. Ananias gave away all his property, and the very gift was his iniquity, for which his life was taken from him.

2. But notice, in the next place, in the conduct of Ananias and Sapphira a *second cause* which there is, by which persons are gradually led to a false and unsound profession in the Church of Jesus Christ: a cause which has reference to *themselves*. It is the cause of *dishonesty*. Ananias and his wife were desirous to have the credit of Christian benevolence, but still they were desirous to have it at a smaller sacrifice, and a less expense than their brethren: and therefore when they had sold the possession they kept back part of the price. Here was a principle of injustice and sinful dishonesty, with a view, as they thought, to their own self-interest. They wanted to obtain the character with others for disinterested Christian benevolence, while in fact the whole of their transaction was founded upon a principle of self.

And certainly this is a motive of conduct, which we cannot shut our eyes to the fact, that it exists in not a little degree in religious profession now. Are there not some whose experience tells them, that in associating with this or that sect of Christians, and avowing themselves to the world to be changed and serious persons, they have an eye to the gains they get by it? Some perhaps the gain of connexion; others the gain of business; others the gain of character and reputation; or others perhaps of a better description, the gain of introduction and society, and

* Rom. xiv. 23.

perhaps of respectable establishment, and honourable circumstance in life.

And whenever this is the case, whenever the outward profession of religion is thus even in part based upon selfish interests, then we may safely ask, is it not like the profession of Ananias, held and maintained upon dishonest principle? Is there not a refusing to make the full sacrifice required, and to go the full length of self-dedication? Are you not, as it respects the duty you owe to God, and to his Church, are you not like Ananias, keeping back part of the price? Refusing to renounce what the Gospel calls upon you for, practising evil deceitfully, and continuing to exercise secrecy and contrivance, in the spirit of the world, and not in the spirit of those who profess to belong to Jesus Christ? It is always so, brethren, the two dispositions are always coupled together. Such a carnal motive as selfish interest, will never be able to bring you to a faithful and spiritual state, and a sound profession of the truth. Nothing but the genuine operations of the Spirit of God can do this: and never will the Spirit of God consent to find a dwelling-place in such a false and carnal disposition.

3. But *thirdly*. Whenever we meet with a false and unsound profession of the faith, we may always be sure that there is one more cause which has led to it, besides the two which have been pointed out: a cause with reference to *God*;—the cause of *secret unbelief*. This is very apparent in the character of Ananias and Sapphira, or they would not have tried to deceive the servants of Christ, they would not have dared to lie to the Holy Ghost.

It is impossible that a person who is acting a part in religion, and systematically carrying on a fraud of character upon the Christian Church, it is impossible

that such an one can really believe that there is a God in heaven, that there is a world hereafter, or that there is a judgment to come. There may not perhaps be an open avowal that there is not. There may be a sort of a shuddering and shrinking from such an avowal. Yea, there may be, on the contrary, a declared avowal that there is. But still the state of such a mind must be practically and really, a state of secret unbelief. The language of the heart is, Tush, God careth not for it: Is there knowledge in the Most High? As for eternity, we have not seen it, we have not known it: How can the dead be raised up, or with what body should they come? Let us eat and drink then, for to-morrow we die. A person that really believes in a spiritual manner, and realizes the coming judgment coupled with the frailness of life and mortality, must at least be conscientious. He knows that the Lord is about him, and even at the doors; he walks as it were in his immediate presence: and he must be conscientious. It must be the desire of his heart, to be an Israelite indeed, to resemble the Lord whom he is following to glory, in whom guile was not able to be found.

II. Let us now direct our thoughts to the *second* part of our subject. Let us observe in the conduct of Ananias and Sapphira, and thereby in all unfaithful and unconscientious professors, the *peculiarity of their sin*. We have already noticed the causes or motives from which it proceeded. And this indeed is part of the sin itself. But let us notice more particularly the peculiar act of transgression which these persons committed. And here we shall have to make the same distinction as before. 1. It was a sin against *others;* that is, against the Church and the ministers of Christ. 2. It was a sin against *themselves;* that is, against their own souls. 3. And it was a sin against *God:* they lied to the Holy Ghost.

1. Consider it in the *first* place, as a sin against *the Church*, and against the *ministers* of Jesus Christ. Ananias had determined to practise a fraud of character upon the Christian Church: to stand forth as a saint amongst the other disciples, and even if he could to deceive the apostles; and Sapphira agreed with him in it. And when Peter, as the minister of Christ, distinctly and plainly asked Sapphira to tell him the truth of the matter, if peradventure he might lead her to see and to feel the iniquity of having conspired together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord, she also shared in her husband's final transgression, by the same sacrifice of truth. And what made it still worse was the circumstance, that the Church was then in its new and infant state. And to join and conspire and make common cause to deceive and injure it, was a great and a crying sin. How could they expect but that all their secrecy and contrivance must be found out at the last, and be a stumbling-block to many, and injure the faith of weak believers? How could they find any comfort or peace of mind, while carrying on, as they hoped they might have done, such a practice of deceitfulness amongst their fellow-disciples! Where was the uprightness of Christian profession? Where was the simplicity of a little child? And how could they hope with any comfort to meet the apostle, with a sense of guilt upon their consciences that they had tried to deceive him, and told him a wilful and deliberate falsehood! How could his ministry of the word be profitable to them! Or if he should afterwards talk with either about their soul, their state as a sinner, and their hope of eternal salvation, how could any thing he said to them be attended with a blessing, while they knew that they were constantly practising guile and deceitfulness upon him! My friends, if there are any of you who feel that this applies to your case, let it be a word in season, before it be too late with you. If you have been unconscientious, and if the

cause of that unfaithfulness has been by Providence removed, and if you wish to get rid of the guilt of it, that it may not hinder your prayers, and shut up your heart from the Lord, then repent you of this your wickedness, if perchance the thought of your heart and the words of your tongue may be forgiven you.

2. A *second* point of their sin. It was a sin against *their own souls*. They encouraged each other by agreeing together to commit it. "How is it" says St. Peter to Sapphira, "that ye have *agreed together* to do this evil thing, to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?" He might well ask the question of her, if so be she could answer it, or give any reason for it. How is it that ye have done this? What has been the cause of it? Is there any account to be given, how you could make such a compact, such a base agreement together? And how great must have been her surprise at the question, to find that her sin was discovered! No doubt she had thought the apostle was ignorant of it: that they had shrewdly concealed from his notice all the proposed iniquity, by which it was planned to deceive him, and all their secret cabals, and all their hard speeches against him. But the Lord revealed it to his servant. The Lord and Saviour, who sitteth on the throne, is good to his faithful ministers, and good to his faithful Church. He holds the stars in his right-hand, and walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks. And when their plan was ripe for fulfilment, a word from the apostle dissolved and confounded it all. It is one of the marks of the faithful, that they neither "stand in the way of sinners, nor walk in the counsel of the ungodly." "O my soul" says righteous Jacob, "come not thou into their secret: unto their assembly, my tongue, be thou not united."*

* Psalm i. 1. Gen. xlix. 6.

3. And then *thirdly*, look at their sin as a sin against *God*. It was not merely to men that they lied, but unto God. They lied to the Holy Ghost. They agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord.

III. But now let us see, in conclusion, when there is sin and unconscientiousness like this, *the necessity* there is, and therefore the *certainty, that the Lord will visit it*. The awful end of Ananias and Sapphira stands in the Word as a fiery beacon, to false and unfaithful, unjust, and deceitful souls. Look at the total defeat of their contrivancy, the total subversion of their aims and purposes. Were they led to this sin of a false profession by the motive of spiritual pride, to obtain a character with men? They were publicly detected, disgraced, and degraded before all the Church of believers. Were they led to commit it, from a feeling of selfishness, in keeping back part of the price? All that they had was taken from them by death, and they, instead, of their money, laid as an offering at the apostles' feet. Did they bring themselves to this act by a secret feeling of unbelief, that God would not care for it, or perhaps that he did not perceive it? Then solemn and awful indeed was the proof that was given them, that verily there is a reward to the wicked, doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth! When they should have passed that invisible boundary, which separates time from the eternal world, they could not disbelieve any more, though perhaps their belief would be that which we read of, to open the eyes in hell, and like the devils to believe and tremble.

And look at the equitable punishment of their sin. Was it a sin against the Church of Jesus Christ, which, then in its infant state, was in risk to be scandalized by having such deceivers amongst its professors? Then the Church, which was injured by their false profession, was justified from their iniquity, and

solemnly warned by their condemnation. "Fear," we are told, "came on every soul." And their sin is put on record to stand as a salutary warning to it, even to the end of the world. Was it a sin against the ministers of Jesus Christ? The Lord has ever shown himself ready to avenge and defend their cause. Their sin, which was meant to deceive them, put honour and dignity upon them. For by the word of St. Peter, a miracle of judgment was performed in their speedy destruction. Was it again a sin against their own souls which they committed? Then upon themselves it was visited, when the message was given them, instantly to forfeit their lives to the just displeasure of the Lord. And was it a sin of unbelief and provocation against the Spirit of the Lord? Then it was made a solemn attestation to the powerful working of the Spirit in the Church, and the need which there is to be watchful and careful, that we do not irreverently tempt him, nor grieve him, nor quench his emotions within us.

Finally, let us draw from this subject *three* remarks by way of further application. 1. Let it lead us to have more deeply and habitually impressed upon our minds, the *omnipresence of Christ in his faithful Church.* "He sitteth on the throne. He holdeth the stars in his hand, and walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks. His countenance is as the sun that shineth in his strength, and his eyes are as a flame of fire." And let us draw from this conviction of his omnipresence amongst us, both encouragement, and caution. Encouragement: for "Lo," says he "I am with you always, even nd of the world." "Wherever two or three are met in my name, there am I in the midst of them." But caution. For he "sits as a refiner of silver, to purify" his people. He is as "a refiner's fire, and like fuller's sope." "Be-

ware of him,"* says God, "and obey his voice, and provoke him not: for he will not pardon your transgressions; for my name is in him."

2. *Secondly*, brethren, let us be *seeking still more diligently for an upright spirit.* If our Lord is thus looking upon us, to prove and try our hearts, O let us strive to attain by the means of grace to a true and a guileless spirit. Let him be our pattern; and let him be our strength to obey it. How delightful is that description given of our Lord, and of those that follow him, in the book of Revelation! "His name is Faithful and True, and the armies that are in heaven follow him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. They are those that are virgins and undefiled, and they follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, and stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion, and in their mouth is found no guile, for they are without fault before the throne of God." Let us seek to be like our Lord then, faithful and true. Let us be still more anxious, and still more determined, to "put away all iniquity" from us; to "cease to do evil, and learn to do well." Let us make the resolution of David. "I will walk in my house with a perfect heart."†

3. And *lastly*. Let us go where alone we can go, *to have strength and grace to do this.* Is our Lord sitting on the throne as the Head of his Church? Then it is to make his grace to be sufficient for us, and to help his believers. He will give grace and glory. He will make us to be more than conquerors. He will supply all our need out of his riches in glory. He will complete the work that he has begun in us, and make us perfect and complete, and sanctify us wholly. O let us ask of him, as his servant of old did, to

* Rev. i. Matt. xxviii. 20.—xviii. 20. Mal. iii. 2, 3. Exod. xxiii. 21.
† Rev. xix. 11, 14.—xiv. 1—4. Hosea xiv. 3. Isa. i. 16. Psalm ci. 3.

search us and try us; to cleanse us both from secret faults and from presumptuous sins, that so we may be upright, and innocent from the great transgression. O let us ever remember, that Christ, as the Lord and Saviour, is the fountain of life to his faithful saints, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.*

* 2 Cor. xii. 9. Psalm lxxxiv. 11. Rom. viii. 37. Phil. iv. 19.—i. 6. Col. iv. 12. 1 Thess. v. 23, 24. Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24.—xix. 12, 13. Eph. i. 23.

SERMON IV.

CLASS II. DEFECT IN PRACTICE. SECTION I.

HEROD ANTIPAS.

For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man, and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly. Mark vi. 20. See also ver. 14—28.

And when Herod saw Jesus he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. Luke xxiii. 8. and see to ver. 11.

NEXT to religious profession in the life proceeding from false and deceitful *principle*, is religious influence on the character enfeebled and terminated by unholy *practice;* by an allowed commencement, and gradually increasing indulgence, and finally habitual addiction, to do iniquity. These are the two most fatal impediments, and the two most manifest and undeniable, by which many who seem to be religious, at least for a season, are prevented from attaining to the saving knowledge of the truth, and at length go out from the Church of the Lord and Saviour, because they are not of it. The first of these defects, a defective principle, we have noticed in the instance of Simon, and that of Ananias and Sapphira. The second we have now to

consider, in the affecting account that is given us of Herod Antipas, or the second Herod.

He is twice introduced to our notice:

I. *First, in connection with John the Baptist.*

II. *Secondly, in connection with Christ himself.* And in both these occasions, considerable light is thrown upon his character, and he is placed before us

In an *interesting and promising* } point of view.
And yet in an *awful and criminal* }

I. Let us begin by observing what is said of him *in connection with John the Baptist.*

And *first,* we shall find in it some features of character of *a promising and interesting* kind.

1. He "feared" or reverenced "John."

2. He discriminated his character that he was a "just and a holy man."

3. He took the pains to "observe" him.

4. He "heard him" it is said:—by which no doubt it is intended, that he heard him at different opportunities preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For we know what it was that John preached, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world."*

5. He heard him "gladly:"—there was a taste, a liking for the word; although we know it was a word

* John i. 29. † Matt. iii. 2.

of austerity, for the preaching of John was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

6. He "did many things:"—perhaps, in the exercise of his kingly power, suppressed a deal of iniquity; encouraged the mission and baptism of John; gave up a good many sinful pursuits and indulgences, and reformed, in a good degree, both the conduct of himself and his people. Moreover, when he was betrayed by Herodias to consent to the Baptist's death, even in the circumstances of that transgression, great as it was, we find three other favourable points in his character.

7. He was "exceeding sorry" for John, and for what he had done to him.

8. He showed a religious reverence for the "oath" he had rashly made.

9. And when he afterwards heard of the fame of Christ, he discovered the pain of his conscience and strong compunction, or at least remorse, when he said of him: It is certainly "John that I beheaded:" he is risen from the dead."

Now certainly these are most favourable points in his character. Certainly they show that the Baptist had been a messenger of God to him, and had been owned by the Holy Spirit to make great impression upon him. Time of course will not allow us to speak upon each of these points particularly, though it would have been profitable for us. But take them collectively, and we may make on them *two* remarks.

1. In the first place we learn from them, that *as much, or even a lesser degree than this, of serious impression,* and inward experience, and outward conduct,

is *often mistaken* by sincere, but light, and untaught disciples, for saving conversion, and for all that the Lord requireth of them.

Is not this the case, brethren? You reverence religion. You reverence the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the ministers and people of Christ, who declare it, and exhibit its spirit to the world. But you do not personally receive and obey it, or conform to its precepts your life and your conversation. You closely observe and rightly estimate their character, and when, like the Baptist, they are just and holy, you acknowledge them to be so: but you do not struggle to attain by the same grace, to be just and holy too. You hear them point you to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world: and you do not, like some do, discover an enmity to their preached word, but you hear them gladly: but it is as you would hear the "things without life giving sounds, whether pipe or harp, without distinction in the sounds; as the sounding brass or the tinkling cymbal." They are "as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument:—for you hear their words but you keep them not."* Like Herod, too, you do many things. You have your outward reformation. You have left off many a sin you could spare to part with. You are toiling through many a duty you can afford to do. Like Herod, you have your compunctions; your stirrings of conscience; your solemn impressions; your regard to sacred obligations: you cannot fall into transgression without a conviction of guilt and subsequent uneasiness for it.

But is this conversion? Surely not, brethren. What then is it? It is only a conviction that you ought to attain to it. It is only a reverence and value

* 1 Cor. xiv. 7.—xiii. 1. Ezek. xxxiii. 32.

for truth: but not a personal experience, not a personal enjoyment of its inward power in the heart. It is a thinking about conversion: it is a hearing about it: yea, perhaps we may say, it is a caring about it. But certainly this is not the having and enjoying it: no more than a man possesses some personal accomplishment, because he admires it in others: no more than he possesses a treasure because he desires to obtain it. Is it then all that the Lord requireth? Surely not. It is not the outward ear which he requireth, nor the mental conviction, nor the occasional desire, Let me die the death of the righteous; but it is the actual and positive realization of the inward conversion of the heart. The workings of thought, the stirrings of conscience, the performance of duties, and the desires of attainment are nothing, except as they lead to a radical change within; except as they sanctify and draw the affections; except as they bring us to obey that injunction which the Father has given us; and which he has commended to us by the exhibition of his redeeming love in Jesus Christ; and which he has promised to work in us, if we seek it, by the power of his Spirit; my son, or my daughter, give me thine heart.

2. But *secondly*, we may remark, from this part of the character of Herod, that whenever any are in such a state of strong but ambiguous and imperfect religious influence, it is very frequently the *critical moment* of their life, upon which the great question depends, whether or not they shall ever be born again. Such persons are not, perhaps, far from the kingdom of God. It is the turning point of their character; an even balance as it were, which of the scales shall rise or fall; the scale of sin and of the world, or the scale of grace and conversion.

It was so with Herod. He seems to have been in

a state of considerable promise, of considerable hopefulness, of good and evangelical impression. If he had yielded his mind and affections to it, if he had let the truth sink down into his heart, and lead him where it offered to lead him, it would surely have brought him to God. It would surely have numbered him with the Lord's disciples, and his former sins would have been forgiven him, and his soul have been washed in the Saviour's blood. But just on the point of turning, just on the point of conversion, the Devil put a weight in the opposite scale. He dragged him into temptation with his brother Philip's wife. He brought him under her evil counsels, and strong encouragements to sin.

My friends, it is highly probable, that in every person's experience, at least in the life of most men, there is this critical turning point between salvation and condemnation; between the strivings of grace to effect conversion, and the powerful opposition of evil influence on the natural carnal mind. It is an awful consideration. There is a certain point that you reach to, sometimes near to the gate of heaven. The mind is interested. The conscience is softened. The heart is affected. And perhaps the resolutions are formed. O how near do some approximate to a real conversion to God! Just at that particular moment the balance is even set between the Saviour and the world. It is a height, perhaps, that is attained to. But it is not quite high enough. And alas! it is the zenith; it is the highest point that they ever in life attain to. From that particular moment there is a retrograde and a downward course. Never again is that soul so near to the kingdom of God, but further, and further from it. Temptation arises. Sin and defilement is fastened upon it. Impressions are weakened, understanding of the truth is obscured, desires are blunted, and grace decays.

My friends, if the Lord has been hard at work with you to bring you to conviction, and has brought you now at the present time in your life, under strong dispositions to true religion, O embrace your opportunity! One step further, and then you are safe! Then you have entered the fold of Christ! Then you are converted! Then you are marked and sealed with the seal of the living God upon your forehead! Be urgent in prayer to Him who alone can effect it, that these impressions may not pass from you, till they have actually brought you into covenant with God; till they have brought you to seek, as a penitent sinner, at the cross of Jesus Christ, for wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

2. This was the highest point of Herod's progress to conversion. Now we proceed with his subsequent history. And what was this? A backward, a froward, and a downward course. So that we have to consider him, as was said, in a *very awful*, and *very criminal* point of view. The facts are simply these.

1. First, he *committed adultery*. He had married the daughter of Aretas, the king of Arabia. But in an act of injustice to her, he put her away, and took by force his brother Philip's wife, in an act of injustice to him.

2. Sin is never single-handed. It goes in a progress from one degree to another. He had sinned as an adulterer, now in consequence of that he became a *murderer*. He murdered a prophet of the Lord. By the contrivance of Herodias, he ordered John to be beheaded. The greatest born among women was put to death by his decree. He proved himself worthy of the name of Herod. There were three of that name, and each was a murderer. The first of them murdered the babes of Bethlehem. The third of them

murdered James, the apostle; and this one, Herod Antipas, murdered John the Baptist, and consented to the death of the Lord himself.

3. The strivings and discipline of grace towards this offending sinner, were now of a different kind. Before, it had been by the preached word; the voice of warning, pleading, and instruction. Now, the Lord *began to resist him.* Like as it was with Balaam, the angel of the Lord began to stand in his way. A course of trial was appointed him, but alas, it would seem rather to be a witness for God against him, than a means of conversion and efficacious grace.

The king of Arabia, whose daughter he had married, and for the sake of adultery had dishonoured by divorce, raised his armies against him. Herod was vanquished and beaten, though still, by the goodness and forbearance of God, his life was spared to him. Josephus, an historian of the time, tells us, that all the Jews pronounced his defeat a judgment because of the Baptist's death.*

With all this testimony for God, still there was no repentance. There seems to have been compunctions. There seems to have been a remorseful uneasy conscience. For as soon as he heard of the fame of Christ, his conscience smote him; it was plain that he thought with remorse of the death he had committed: "This" said he "is John that I beheaded; he is risen from the dead." But still we do not discover a contrite spirit.

Moreover, the Lord still sent him some to admonish him. He had made away with John. But other disciples were sent to him, even to live in his house. Some of his own servants became the follow-

* Antiq. lib. 18. c. 7.

ers of Jesus Christ. One of them, Johanna, the wife of his steward Chuza, is particularly mentioned. And we are told that he talked with them, who the Saviour was.

II. At last *the Lord himself*, it was so decreed, was *sent to him personally* by the governor Pontius Pilate. It was granted even to him, unworthy as he was, to see with his eyes the Son of God in the flesh.

1. And again we discover the same development of natural character in Herod, the same *encouraging appearances* which we have noticed in the case of John. It is said, that when Herod saw Jesus, he was "exceeding glad;" for he was "desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him."

Just conceive, brethren, what an awful witness against him. He had heard John, and here we are told he had heard many things of Jesus. He had heard that the dead were raised by him, the sick recovered, and the blind received their sight. He had heard John gladly, and when he saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad. He had been of a long season wishing and desiring to see him. And yet he had never sought for him. And now that the Lord was actually brought before him, what does he do? Does he fall down and worship him? Does he humble the pride of his heart before him? Does he, with all his recollections of adultery and murder upon him, fall down at his feet and say to him, Have mercy upon me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord? If he had done this, then even yet, there had been acceptance for him: Christ would then have instructed him, then have had compassion upon him.

2. But again, he is finally set forth to us, in a most awful character indeed. For what did he do on this momentous occasion? In the hardened unbelief of his heart, which sin had produced in him, and in the pride of his carnal mind, "he looked" it is said "to have seen some miracle done by him." And he "proved and questioned him with many words." He sought for a sign in a lofty rebellious spirit, and not, in the spirit of a disciple, desired to hear and to keep his sayings. And what was the consequence? The Saviour "answered him not a word." It was as if he would say to him, I know the state of thy heart, and thou knowest it also; and all these things that thou seekest, the truth that I teach, is hid from the wise and prudent, revealed only unto babes. The Lord was silent. But on the other hand the Scribes and the Priests were not. They "stood, it is said, "and violently accused Christ." Herod, perhaps was halting, leaning somewhat to Jesus, wavering at least in his mind respecting him. But again the Devil put a stumbling-block in his way. The Scribes and Priests were Satan's emissaries, to secure the soul of this offender; to turn him finally against and away from the Saviour; and they prevailed to effect it. What was the end of it; Herod assembled his "men of war." They took their royal prisoner, our ever-blessed Lord, who was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and when he was reviled, reviled not again; and what did they do with him? They placed upon him a shining robe, a mockery of royalty, and they stood before him, and "set him at nought, and mocked him."

This was the climax of Herod's transgression. Once, more than half a disciple, and even to the end having his impressions, receiving his warnings, enjoying with gladness his opportunities, and often wavering towards the truth; in the midst of judgments, and strivings, and mercies, and means of grace; he

began at one evil moment in the counsel of the ungodly, and he never ceased till it brought him at last to sit in the scorner's chair. He stood before the Redeemer, our blessed Immanuel, our Lord and our God, and he mocked and reviled him.

His end, after this, was an affecting one. History tells us, that through an intrigue at the court of Rome, he was shortly banished from his kingdom. He was sent into exile to the city of Lyons, in the kingdom of France. Herodias, the partner of his sins, still went with him, and there he died.* He ended his days with the dreadful sin, unwashed and unrepented upon him, that for the sake of a carnal gratification, for the sake of adultery, itself a sin, he had murdered the greatest of prophets, and joined in the sentence of death upon God's beloved Son.

My friends, where is he now? How has he borne to behold that suffering Saviour, whom he had mocked upon earth, exalted to royal dignity, God over all things, blessed for evermore! Perhaps in the time of his age and exile, perhaps in his sickness, and on his dying bed, the suffering countenance of Jesus Christ, as the man of sorrows, whose face was marred more than any man's, and, with the weight of grief that was upon him, more than the sons of men, perhaps that suffering form and countenance which he had mocked and derided, would often present itself before him and haunt his guilty mind. But when his eyes were closed in death, and opened on the visions of eternity, how should he look at that risen and glorified Lord? His countenance clouded no more with sorrow, but shining as the sun in its strength? His gorgeous and shining robe of earthly royalty, with which Herod for mockery had arrayed him, exchanged

* Antiq. Joseph. lib. 18. c. 9. The same historian says: de bello lib. 2. c. 16., that he afterwards removed into Spain.

for the garment of Godhead,* and as it was at his transfiguration, white as the light, so as no fuller on earth can white them.

In conclusion, we have still to draw from this latter part of our subject two or three practical and personal remarks.

My friends, the case of Herod, Herod's falling short of conversion, solemnly calls upon you to beware of *three* things, which were the cause of his doing so. Beware of the *first beginning,* the *after-progress,* and the *final victory* of sin. This is the second of our defective cases; the falling short of conversion through the deceitfulness of *sin.*

Salvation is free to you. Grace is sufficient. The love of Jehovah is omnipotent and everlasting. But you must not sin. You must walk in the light, and wash your hands in innocence, or you will not be able to retain the knowledge of God, to enjoy his presence, to lay hold of his promises, or to do his will. Sin, if you practise it, will certainly keep you from grace, whereas this is the order: grace you must seek for, which is able to keep you from sin. Sin will harden your conscience. Sin will extinguish the light you have. Sin will increase to more ungodliness. It will give you, like Herod, a questioning, unbelieving, miracle-seeking mind. And then, when you call to the Saviour, he will answer you not a word.

On the other hand, for ever blessed be his name, that he is to be found and enjoyed by the humble, penitent, seeking soul. Seek in the spirit of a little child. Sit like Mary at his feet to wait for and hear his word. And he will surely answer you. He will teach and instruct you. And if you do his will, you

* Psalm civ. 2.

will certainly know his doctrine, and know that it is of God. Your light will be brighter, and your knowledge more certain and large and clear. Your sense of a present and personal salvation, will amount to a personal assurance, and at last you will rejoice in his name all the day with joy unspeakable and full of glory. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand; my Father which gave them me is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand: I and my Father are one."

SERMON V.

CLASS II. DEFECT IN PRACTICE. SECTION II.

JUDAS ISCARIOT.

Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? John vi. 70.

THE history of Judas appears to offer an illustration of what has been considered in the case of Herod, *defective practice* in religious conduct, but also arising from, and therefore combined with, a very marked exemplification of the former defect we spoke of, *defective principle* in religious character. It is a mournful and affecting example of *secret unfaithfulness*:—want of fidelity and truthfulness in the actual conduct, because of the same untruthfulness in the inward principle. The one arises very naturally from the other; the act from the disposition. The course of progress is very justly described in the 78th Psalm, concerning the ancient backsliding Jews: "They flattered him with their mouth, and lied unto him with their tongues; for their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant." And then, as the natural result of such a condition of character, "they tempted and provoked the Most High God, and kept not his testimonies; but turned back and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers, and were turned aside like a deceitful bow."

I mean then by *secret unfaithfulness*, a disposition to deal treacherously with God. The want of truth in the inward parts. The want of upright and virtuous principle to love the thing which is right, and to do the thing which is right in the sight of God. And this will eventually show itself in the having some indulgences of secret sin, which are still persisted in, or else in the criminal abuse of secret exercises, which, to the habitual jeopardy of the conscience, are greatly slighted or neglected.

One of the names of the Saviour's people upon earth is that they are the "*Faithful.*" That is, just as we speak of a faithful friend or a faithful servant, so those who are truly and in godly sincerity followers of Jesus are his faithful friends and servants. It is the name and the character of their Master likewise: "His name is called, Faithful and True." And why are his people called the Faithful? Because they have a charge which he has given them to keep, duties to fulfil, and sins to flee from; a conflict and warfare to maintain; a life to conform to his will; and in short to take up his cross and deny themselves and follow him. And they are called the Faithful because they do this; because they keep that charge which their Lord has given them. But when they forget and do not keep this charge; when they neglect that duty which they owe to Jesus Christ; when they are careless about pleasing him and living according to his Gospel; then they are unfaithful to him, and the sin of unfaithfulness is upon them.

And, my brethren, this is not an uncommon case, or one that seldom occurs. A very little observation shows us that there are many individuals exactly in this state. Once they seemed to be enlightened, and to taste the powers of the world to come. Once they were happy in the worship and service of the Father,

and of Christ. Once they had the witness of the Spirit, and for a season seemed to walk in the Spirit, and crucify the flesh with the lusts thereof. Now they have closed their eyes upon religion. Now they have lost their relish for its services. Now they have turned their back upon the Lord and Saviour and gone away into the world.

And this, brethren, is perhaps the most unhappy state in which a person can be in this present life. Outward afflictions may be borne with cheerfulness. The greatest losses and privations may be submitted to, when there is an upright conscience, and a mind at peace within itself: but when the heart is not right with God, when a man's conscience accuses him that he is unfaithful, and yet he still continues to live in that state, he is full of inward disquietude, he knows that he is not happy. Let his worldly circumstances appear to prosper as they may, still the blessing of the Lord is not in them, the light of his countenance does not shine upon them.

But I shall proceed to point out some particular features in the character I wish to describe to you. "Have I not chosen you twelve," says Christ, "but one of you is a Devil?"

There are four or five very awful instances of this sort of unfaithfulness recorded in Scripture. Such as Esau, who was profane and sold his birthright; such as Balaam, who for the wages of unrighteousness taught Israel to sin; such as Saul, whose life was one course of disobedience to the Lord, and abuse of the greatest privileges; such as Simon Magus, whose heart was not right within him, so that he had neither part nor lot in the matter; and such as this character of Judas, of whom our Lord spake this sentence, "One of you is a Devil."

Now when we look into the character of Judas, or those others I have mentioned, we find that they did not come to such a pitch of iniquity suddenly and all at once. There was a growth and progress in sin. There was a gradual departing of the heart from God; a progressive hardening of the heart and searing of the conscience; a gradual filling up of the measure of their iniquities, and fitting themselves as fuel for the fire of the wrath of Almighty God. God was striving with them and they were resisting. He was showing them mercy and forbearance, but they were ungrateful for it, and shut their eyes against it: till at last the time came for him to smite them, to give them up to a reprobate mind, and to pour out his plagues upon them. He swore in his wrath against them that they should not enter into his rest. "Have not I chosen you twelve, but one of you is a devil?"

I. It will be the *first* object of this discourse to trace this *progress of sin*, wherever it is suffered to take possession of the heart.

1. At the root of all that is subsequently reached to in transgression, there will be *a disingenuous mind*. The first thing which we read in the history of Judas is, that "he was a thief."* He carried the bag, in which the money for the provision of the Lord and his disciples, or for charity to the poor, was kept; and the evangelist tells us that he was a thief, and plundered it. He could so far violate his conscience, as to plunder that little community whom he pretended to walk with as brethren, and to rob the poor of that little which the charity of others had collected for them. My dear brethren, mark in all this the first beginning of iniquity. Observe the first seeds of sin, which, from such a commencement, afterwards spring up and

* John xii. 6.

strengthen themselves in the carnal and unregenerate mind. There is a secret principle of disingenuousness towards God and towards man, a leaven of insincerity which has never been rooted out: the heart has never been cleansed from it by the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost. It is a disease in the vitals, and is working death in the soul. It is like a worm in the bud, or like some of those diseases which are steadily, though perhaps secretly, preying on the constitution, and destroying the powers of life. Or it is like a slow or malignant poison which requires time to work, but then its effects are discovered when it is too late to mend them.

2. It follows therefore *secondly* from this, that there will soon be *a revealing of sin;* the *working* of sin into open practice. The Devil, it is said, "put it into his heart." Having gotten such a heart of deceit and corruption to work upon, he began by injecting evil thoughts, like a serpent injects its poison, gradually to work in its victim to its ultimate destruction: the "Devil put it into the heart* to betray" his Lord. Where the secret principle is disingenuousness, the character will speedily show itself, according as the events of life, and the connexions of life, and the temptations or the duties of life, call it into action. There will soon be a carelessness of indulging besetting sins, and breaking the laws of God: there will soon be a progress from little sins to great ones. The mind will become darkened and obscured. The principles of faith will decay and languish. There will be a cloud between God and the soul. Prayer will be gradually neglected and at last entirely given up. The Holy Spirit will no longer shine upon the Word, but the Bible will lose its interest, and at last it will not be read. In short, religion at the last will be

* John xiii. 2.

completely neglected. A mist of great darkness will cover the soul. God will hide himself from it, and the heavens will be as brass to it and closed against it.

3. *Thirdly.* There will not only be a *working*, there will likewise be what the Scripture calls the *fulness of iniquity*. There will be a *ripening or maturity of sin:* sin will go on to its completeness. "After the sop Satan entered into him." "One of you is a devil." Persons who have got into this state of increasing sin, deceive themselves by thinking, that there is no great mischief in it; that they are only standing still for a season, and that they shall one day be awakened out of it, and all will again be right with them. But this is a great and a fatal error. Sin is really gaining strength in them and getting deeper root in the heart: "evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." And thus the end of such persons is frequently found to be, that they finish their course with some great and notorious transgressions. See how it was with Judas: mark the progress of his iniquity. He began by being "a thief," and having a false and dishonest heart. Then it is written, that Satan "put it into his heart to betray" his Lord. Then that "after the sop Satan entered into him." So that the Lord pronounced him to be himself "a devil:" "have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" Then sin was at the full in him. He committed that act of treachery which marked him to be the "son of perdition." And lastly, in a fit of remorse and despair, he went and hanged himself and went "to his own place."*

And, my brethren, has he not thus left an awful example to those who deal falsely with God? Has he not shown us what a dismal end a state of unfaith-

* Acts i. 25.

falness will lead to? Once let the heart begin departing from God, and who shall say where it shall stop? From the disciple of Jesus, yea one of his twelve disciples, he became not only an agent of Satan, but himself a devil! "Have not I chosen you twelve, but one of you is a devil."

Now it may be that I am speaking to some of you who have gone some length in a course of sin and unfaithfulness. You did not begin at the first by getting your heart right with God. You soon proceeded therefore to a negligent and careless spirit. You have gradually thrown off the restraints of religion. And now you are living in a state of darkness and in a state of sin. You have silenced your conscience though still it testifies against you, and tells you that if you die in this state, it is impossible you can be saved.

II. I would endeavour therefore *secondly* to suggest something to you which might be *a word to awaken you and bring you back to God.* I would urge it upon you to escape from such a state of mind, by *four* considerations.

1. By its *extreme danger.*
2. By its *present misery.*
3. By its *Satanic tendency.*
4. And by its *needless continuance,* that is, by the offers of mercy and the possibility of escape.

1. Consider *first,* dear brethren, the *extreme risk and danger* of such a condition. You will find, if you look into such cases, that they are most of them, I had almost said all of them, fatal ones, and such as men never recover from. It is seldom, very seldom indeed, that such an one returns unto God. When sin against light and knowledge has fairly got possession of the heart, and rules and reigns there, it is rarely found

for he had eaten no bread all the day nor all the night;" and at the last, when there was no one that would kill him, he fell upon his sword and died. Such is the present misery of an unfaithful man.

3. Then *thirdly*, look at the effect of unfaithfulness in *its Satanic tendency*: "One of you is a devil:" the "son of perdition." "Satan entered into him." Look at the debasing and poisonous influence which such a course of character had upon the mind of Judas. See how it brought him under the power of Satan, and see how it worked in him, to lead him still further from righteousness, and made him at the last himself a devil! And so it is likely to be with every one whose heart departeth from the Lord. They will go from sin to sin, from one degree of guilt to another, till at last, in the strong language of Scripture, they are "full of all subtilty and mischief, the enemies of all righteousness, and children of the Devil." They are "clouds without water; trees twice dead, without fruit; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever."

4. *Finally*, dear brethren, I would urge it upon you to flee from this state of iniquity, by its *needless continuance*, by the offers of mercy and the means of escape that are set before you. If you have found by experience that to deal falsely with God, and to have your heart not right with him, is already hell upon the earth, then make haste to return to him and to renew your covenant with him as a God of love and a God of grace,—love to pardon, grace to save and sanctify. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon." As you value your eternal salvation, do this without delay. You know that you must do it before you can die in peace,

or go out of the world in hope or safety. Time is passing and life is hastening on. Death often comes in a short and unlooked-for moment. And how shall it find you or whither shall it take you after this present world? Think how much you have at stake in it! A world of immortal happiness and glory for a life that can never end! And this you are sacrificing, not for present comfort and enjoyment, but, as I have shown you, and as your own experience tells you, for present distress and misery! O make up your mind, my brethren, to halt no longer between two opinions! Decide the doubtful question, and let your purpose be fixed for ever, that you will be the Lord's: that you will be his in body, soul, and spirit. Let this be the day of revival to you. Go home and renew your covenant with the Lord your God. Put away from you all that is evil in your practice or inconsistent in your life. Wash away the guilt of past unfaithfulness by a fresh application to the precious blood of Christ. And then go on your way rejoicing, with singleness and gladness of heart.

SERMON VI.

CLASS III. DEFECT IN IMPRESSION.

FELIX.

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will send for thee. Acts xxiv. 25.

WE have considered two out of five of those particular classes of character in the New Testament, which, together, make up the rank of *defective cases* in the matter of evangelical conversion. That is, those which fell short of a real regenerative change of heart, owing to some fatal and radical defect in them; a defect in *principle,* or a defect in *practice,* or else in *impression,* or else in *extent,* or else in *final perseverance.*

We have seen the defect in *principle,* in the character of Simon, and of Ananias and Sapphira; a vain and selfish purpose; a mind unsanctified by the profession of the faith; a heart not right with God. We have examined the character of Herod as a case defective through evil *practice:* his mind instructed; his fears awakened; his desires excited; his affections greatly moved: but his soul made shipwreck of, through the deceitfulness of sin, through its gratified

indulgence. And we have seen, in the character of Judas Iscariot, a more particular example of the union that frequently obtains between both these defects, that is, of *principle* and *practice*, combining together, as the natural course of consequence, to the inevitable ruin of the soul.

We have now before us, the case of the governor Felix; and this we may consider as,

III. *A case defective in impression.*

The truth was frequently heard by him. The truth was repeatedly for a length of time inquired into. The truth was moreover understood by him; he had, it is said, "a perfect knowledge of the way."* But there was a great and a sad deficiency in the impression it made upon him: the impression of the truth, as we shall see in the course of this sermon, was upon his conscience, but it was not upon his heart. The state, alas, of many, many a hearer! The truth of the Gospel, the claim of the Gospel, has reached the conscience; but the love of the Gospel, the power of the Gospel, has not reached the heart. And therefore the character is unconverted. The knowledge of Christ enlightens. The law of Christ remonstrates. But the love of Christ does not constrain. The mind enlightened deepens the condemnation; the conscience testifies against the transgressor, and adds to his present chastisement: the heart, still carnal and closed against its testimony, seals the mark of wilful guilt upon the forehead, and gives a solemn foreboding, that the soul of that person is surely and steadily, as fast as time can carry it, going its way to hell.

Now then, this is just the point which I wish to

make the subject of a sermon from the character mentioned in the text, the case of the governor Felix; the very frequent and mournful class of religious deficiency, of defective approach towards real conversion, which comes from a want of sufficient *impression* from the preached truth. And in this way. The truth which Jehovah has revealed for the saving of sinners, the truth as it is in Jesus, is set before them. The way for that truth to make impression is, by first *enlightening the mind.* This has been done in them. Their mind is enlightened. They have like Felix "a perfect knowledge of the way." They have heard concerning the faith in Christ; concerning righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come. There is nothing more to be done in this respect for them. They have heard it all. They have understood it all. They know it all. By means of enlightening the mind, an impression is made upon them. The truth as it enters in, makes that impression. But this impression as we have said, is of *two* kinds, an impression on the *conscience,* or an impression on the *heart.* The impression upon the conscience is a conviction of duty, a sense of fear, a feeling of constraint, a dread of punishment, and a sort of purpose to surrender. But the impression upon the heart, is a readiness of compliance, a working of desire, a turning of the will, a drawing of the affections, a service of love, an affectionate filial yielding of the whole self, to Him who has loved us and given himself for us.

Now when there are both of these, a work upon the conscience, and a work upon the heart, and both of them arising from the truth enlightening the mind, when there is all this, there is real conversion. But where there is only one of these impressions, whichever it be, there the case is defective. If it is only in the heart, only in the feelings, without a solemnity of fear upon the conscience, a person may be ex-

ceeding glad of the truth, like Herod, and yet may sin away his soul. And if it is only a work of fear upon the conscience, without a filial drawing of the heart, then, like Felix he may tremble; whenever he hears the word he may tremble; he may do this as Felix did for two whole years, and yet postpone his repentance, yet delay to surrender, yet practically say to the preacher, "Go thy way;" and yet at the last, like Felix, end in sin, when he went from his government, and to do the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

Here therefore are three degrees of gracious effect or influence from the preached Gospel of Jesus Christ, by the work of the Holy Spirit, which are all of them necessary to be together, in order to constitute a truly converted character.

I. *The entrance of the truth into the mind.*
II. *The witness of the truth in the conscience.*
III. *The power of the truth in the heart.*

And in this discourse, taking the case of Felix as the guide, I shall endeavour, in this order and progress, to set these points before you: and then, in the sequel, to bring out the defect that we speak of, by which so many promising disciples fall short of the kingdom of God. And while we speak on these different states of religious impression, may we each examine ourselves, in order to know and discover to which of these states of character we belong: or whether we must fear we have attained to none of them: or whether we may hope that we possess them all.

I. First of all then:—the *beginning* of a right religious *impression*, or rather, to speak more correctly, the mean which leads to it, is *the entering in of the truth into the mind.* "The entering in of thy word

giveth light."* This Felix had. And that we may know the better, exactly what it is that we mean to imply by it, let us just examine a little what it was that he had; that is, what, it is said, were the subjects preached to him, and of which he had the knowledge. If you look at the 22nd verse of this chapter, you find it there said of him, that he had "more perfect knowledge of the way." The "way" is an expression used in this book of the Acts to signify the substance of the Christian revelation and profession; as in fact the way by which true believers are travelling and journeying to the heavenly kingdom. Of this "way," it is said, Felix the governor had a more perfect knowledge than the high-priest himself and the elders, who had brought the apostle Paul before him.† In the 24th verse you have more distinctly stated what was the way, concerning which he had this knowledge. He "heard," it is said, St. Paul, "concerning the faith in Christ." For Christ is the way to the Father by faith in him. Christ is "the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by him;"‡ and then in the verse of our text, you have more particularly stated, what were the main and essential parts of this faith in Christ which the apostle preached; "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." "Righteousness," or a sinner's acceptance and justification with God. "Temperance," or personal government; personal sanctification. And a "judgment to come:" that is, final condemnation to the unaccepted and unsanctified, but the hope of eternal

* Psalm cxix. 130.

† There is a little difficulty in the use of the comparative term, as to whom it refers to, whether Ananias, Tertullus, &c., or Lysias. But as it regards the governor's Christian knowledge, Whitby has a valuable note. "Having his residence at Cæsarea, where Cornelius and his friends were converted, where Philip the evangelist dwelt, and where there were many disciples, (xxi. 8, 16.) he became thus acquainted with the way of Christianity."

‡ John xiv. 6.

life and of a joyful resurrection to those who possess this faith, to those who believe in the name of the Son of God. And in the 14th and following verses, you find the apostle still even more plainly declaring to him, what these matters were: how he himself had received them, and was acting faith upon them: how he was personally living just by this faith in Christ which he preached unto others. "So worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and the Prophets." Here was his "righteousness." He believed the things that were written of Christ. Again; "herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence both towards God and man." Here was his "temperance." "And I have hope toward God, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust." Here was his "judgment to come."

Now herein, beloved brethren, consists the substantial reality of Christian truth, of the way, of the faith in Christ. To hear, to receive, to understand, and to know all this, is the first step of progress that we mention in the work of religious impression. It is the entering in of the truth as an enlightening to the mind.

This was possessed by Felix. And, suffer the inquiry, Is it possessed by you? For is it not needful to ask the question, and to ask it with doubt of some of you, whether you have as yet even so much as a right understanding, a right perception of the truth? Do you, beloved, perceive the force and the beauty of this threefold division of the truth as it is in Jesus; "Righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come?" And is this the nature of your faith in Christ? Are you looking at him, at his finished work, as your only righteousness, your justifying righteousness with God? Do you plainly and clearly see, satisfyingly see, that nothing else can

avail you; that here you must stand or fall; that all your own righteousness is as filthy rags; that upon this, and this alone, you must venture your safety for the eternal world? Again, do you plainly perceive that while you rely upon Jesus Christ for acceptance, you must use the power of his truth, the might of his Spirit, for personal temperance, for personal keeping, for personal sanctification? And then, have you perceived that in this position it is, in the use of these two particulars, that you must patiently wait for eternity, for the hope of the resurrection, for the judgment to come? Then here is the first beginning, which ever leads a soul to real religious impression. Here is right and saving knowledge if it is rightly used. Without such knowledge it is quite inevitable there is no salvation. Those who see not the way, cannot possibly travel it. Those who know nothing of the faith in Christ certainly cannot believe in him, and if they believe not, we know they must die in their sins.*

II. *Secondly.* When there has been this entrance of the truth, as a matter of light into the mind, then a further important effect of it, is *its work upon the conscience;* its witness and testimony there. Knowledge of itself is of small account. If it is cold and barren, if it is not influential, it is worse than none. The knowledge of Gospel truth must lead to an inward work. And in the first place, it will be this witness in the conscience. This we shall also find, that Felix was not a stranger to. There are three marks of it, which are visible in his conduct, and by which you may try, brethren, if it is so with you.

1. In the *first* place, *uneasiness and disturbancy of mind.* This was particularly manifested, and will be in all when the truth has reached the conscience,

* John viii. 24.

by a degree of desire and at least occasional anxiety to hear the word. Three particular times we read of his having St. Paul before him, and that he openly said, he would "know the uttermost of the matter."* And in the last two verses of the chapter, we read that he sent for him "often," for "two" whole "years," though not it is true without a corrupt design, and that he "communed with him."

Have you this mark, brethren, of an awakened conscience? A great desire to hear the living word? A frequent coming to it, where it is faithfully preached? A frequent reading of its pages, wherein it is faithfully set before you? If you have no such custom, certainly your conscience is not alive unto God. But if you experience it, perhaps it is beginning to be so.

2. A *second* important mark in the governor Felix of the effect of the truth upon the conscience, was an evident *sense of guilt and self-condemnation.* While Paul was setting those things before him, what did he do? The words are in every one's mouth and remembrance; "Felix trembled." He felt that the word was spoken against himself. He felt the force of the appeal it made to him. He felt the hand-writing of the law. He felt his guilt. He felt his condemnation. And when he thought of the resurrection, that his body must die and be buried, and after that rise again to the solemn visions of eternity, to the awful realities of an eternal world; he trembled and shook as he sat on his kingly throne.

And surely, my friends, you are not entirely and altogether strangers to this! If you are, if without thought or feeling you can hear the word of the Lord, then are you careless, then are you cold indeed! But

* Ver. 22.

have you not felt these emotions, these strong and powerful convictions, at least for some short and transient moments, under the living word? Then here are the Spirit's strivings; here is the work of impression; here is the conscience touched by the finger of God; here is his grace and compassion to you: here is a power exerted that might have long since brought you to repentance, had you obeyed it, had you listened to its voice.

3. And then, *thirdly*; where the conscience is affected, there will also be a *certain particular description of outward fruits.* Felix was kind to his prisoner Paul. He gave him "liberty." He let the saints have access to him, and without persecution let them minister unto him.*

And O how much of the good works of Christian professors are done from this inadequate feeling now! Done to pacify the frightened conscience, not to gratify the loving heart. Charities are given to cover a multitude of sins. Prayers are repeated! Churches attended! Sermons listened to with the outward ear! Sacraments partaken of! Sins abstained from, and deeds of duty done! And yet, after all, what does it all amount to? Though I achieve all this, and "have not love, it profiteth me nothing." It is giving to Jehovah all things else but the only thing he wants. He says to me "give me thine heart." And you practically say to him, We will give thee any thing instead of it; but this is the thing that we cannot,—and, must it be said of you?—this, the heart, is the thing that we will not give.

III. We come to our *third* particular. We have traced by particular marks *the entrance of the truth into the mind;* and *the work of the truth upon the con-*

* Ver. 23.

science. Both these Felix had. But in order to real and spiritual conversion, in order to complete the religious *impression,* one thing more is needful, one more part of that impression, and to this he was a stranger; the further impression we spoke of, was *the power of the truth in the heart.*

In a really converted person, the truth, as a matter of enlightening, has found its access to the mind. By this it has reached the conscience. And by this it has reached the heart. It has turned the affections. It has completely changed and engaged the will. It has fixed the desires by a power of love. And the object which they are fixed upon, the object of strong affection and strong desire, is the Saviour that has loved us, and given himself for us; it is the Lord Jesus Christ. The heart is united to Christ, given to Christ, devoted and married to Christ. His service is perfect freedom, his yoke is easy and his burthen light. To walk in his way, to tread in his steps, to follow his course to heaven, is not a dull and a gloomy process, but the highest enjoyment we seek for, the highest end that we desire.

Now then, here was the deficiency in the character of Felix, which renders his case a case *defective of conversion.* This was the defect that we speak of—the defect in religious *impression.* This impression of the truth was a speculative impression in the outward understanding:—a convictive impression on the conscience—but not the most important of all, a convertive impression in the heart.

There are some affecting proofs of this in the little account that is given us; but I must merely mention them and pass them by.

1. First, his *delay,* his procrastination. "I will

hear thee when thy accusers are come." Then, "when Lysias is come, I will know the uttermost." And then, "at a more convenient season." And until this season, "Go thy way."* 2. Secondly. *His corrupt intention:* "He hoped that money should be given him of Paul."† 3. Thirdly. His *long resistance to the truth.* He heard the apostle thus for a space of two whole years, and still he was unconverted.‡ 4. And lastly, his *final act of injustice.* In return for all his ministrations, what did he do with the apostle? To "show the Jews a pleasure, he left Paul bound."‖

And now, my friends, in conclusion, let us make two further uses of the subject in the way of closer application.

1. First, for *Enquiry.*
2. Second, for *Exhortation.*

1. First, for *Enquiry.* You are all perhaps desirous to know, how you may discover, as a thing of personal knowledge, whether your heart is engaged or not in this all-important matter; whether the truth has yet made a substantial, and lasting, and affectionate, and saving impression upon you. We shall speak of the positive proofs, the *affirmative* proofs of this, when we come to the cases of real conversion, which we propose hereafter to consider. Then it will be to show what are the proofs of a truly regenerate and converted state. Let it suffice for the present, to condense and apply these particular *negative* proofs, drawn from the case of Felix, whereby you may know if this is not the case with you; if your heart is a stranger to real and effectual grace, to divine impressions upon it.

Is it then your experience, that you, like Felix,

* Chap. xxiii. 35. Ver. 22, 25. † Ver. 26. ‡ Ver. 26, 27. ‖ Ver. 27.

notwithstanding the convictions of conscience, yet *put off and postpone* the continual claims of the truth upon you? That you are content to delay? Content to hazard your late repentance? And while the Gospel is spreading around you, and sounding ever in your ears, and bringing forth one and another from out of a wicked world, you are content to incur the guilt, that you are neglecting so great salvation? Alas! my brother, my sister, if the Gospel had done its work in you, if your heart were engaged in it, you would not be dealing thus concerning it. Is it not a lamentable proof to you, that however you fear it, you love it not? You could not be saying with the sluggard, before you awake to righteousness, "A little more sleep and a little slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep."

And then, has there been with you, as there was with Felix, a *long resistance* of the truth? Have you slighted your warnings? Have you forgotten your mercies? Have you neglected your reproofs? Have you turned from your solemn visitations, and quenched and subdued the strivings of grace within you?

And have you, like Felix, already summed up your course of experience respecting the truth, in an act of *wilful* mental resolution against it? After two years' tampering, he left Paul bound. Then your heart is away from the Lord. Then you are cold to divine impressions, and as to any effectual conversion, dead to the workings of saving grace.

2. Suffer me, therefore, finally, to speak a word of *Exhortation.* We urge and beseech you, beloved brethren, never to rest contented, while this which has been described is really the case with you: never to rest in those other degrees of impression, external light, or internal fears and convictions; but to seek, as

you value your soul's salvation, to seek from a gracious and a grace-giving Saviour, for the higher and better impression of cordial and heartfelt and ardent love. Believe it, He is able to give it you, and willing to work it in you. His work, when he does it, is a work in the heart. And if you ask him he will do this for you.

See, from this case of Felix, that to hear the word is nothing; to hear the very first of the apostles, yea, if you could do it, to hear an angel from heaven, if only to hear, is of small avail. Are there not those to whom it is "spoken in parables, that have eyes, but see not, that hear, but do not understand?*

See, from this case of Felix, that knowledge itself is nothing, except it be sanctified, except it be rightly used. His was a perfect knowledge, a purpose to know the uttermost. There is a knowledge that we read of, which, instead of being a benefit, shall "beat its possessor with many stripes."†

See, from this case of Felix, that even to fear and to tremble is nothing, under the living word. What are those beings that we read of, who but the "devils," that "believe and tremble" too?‡ Who are they that are first on the list, for the "lake that burneth with fire?" Surely they are the "fearful." "The fearful and unbelieving, with murderers and idolaters," shall have their portion there.

This is the only sure criterion; this is the only evidence; this is the only safety; and this let each of us seek for every day of our life:—even to obey that injunction, by the power of heavenly grace; "My son," or my daughter, "give me thine heart."

* Matt. xiii. 14, 15. † Luke xii. 47. ‡ James ii. 19. Rev. xxi. 8.

SERMON VII.

CLASS IV. DEFECT IN DEGREE. SECTION I.

AGRIPPA.

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. Acts xxvi. 28.

THE fourth of our classifications of the different particular cases related in the New Testament, as defective, imperfect cases in the matter of a spiritual *Conversion*, is,

IV. *Defectiveness in degree.*

There are two very striking examples of it, which we shall have to consider.

SECTION I.—The first, for the present opportunity, is the character of *Agrippa.*

We considered last Sabbath the case of the governor Felix. The defect, by which he appeared to come short of this state of real conversion, was shown to consist in the want of sufficient measure of right religious *impression.* And in this way. The proper impression made by religious truth, the truth as it is in Jesus, when it is fully received, when it brings a person to salvation, is of *three* kinds. The *entering in* of the truth, as *a light into the mind.* The *testi-*

mony of the truth as *a work upon the conscience.* And the *victory* of the truth as a *power in the heart;* that is, converting and turning the will, and drawing the affections and desires to God the Father, in the Lord Jesus Christ. The first of these, light in the mind, Felix had: his mind was fully enlightened by a "perfect knowledge of the way." The second of these, a work upon the conscience, Felix had: his conscience was greatly awakened, even to a visible bodily sensibility, when he "trembled" and shook on his kingly throne. But the third of these particulars, the influence of the truth upon the heart, and will, and affections, Felix was a stranger to: and therefore at last he "went his way:" away from his religious impressions, away from his religious opportunities, and "left Paul bound." How many, alas, have gone and done likewise, and will find at the judgment-day, that, not from want of frequent means and opportunities, not from want of knowledge, not from want of impression, but from want of willingness, from the want of a changed, renewed, converted heart, they have fallen short of the kingdom and glory of God!

Agrippa appears to have been a great deal nearer than Felix to a truly converted state: yea almost as near as he could be without partaking of it. He was "almost a Christian;" almost persuaded at least to be one. He had what Felix had towards it, but he had more besides. He had the light of truth upon upon his mind: "the king," said Paul, "knoweth of these things before whom I speak and none of them are hidden from him:" And again, "King Agrippa believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest."* He had also the witness of the truth, the fear of God, upon his conscience. There was the same anxiety to hear which we remarked in Felix. When Festus told him of Paul, "I was wishing,"†

* Ver. 26, 27. † Ch. xxv. 22. Gr. ἐβουλόμην.

said he, "to hear the man myself." And he felt and acknowledged the justice of his cause. "This man," he said of Paul, "doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds, and might have been set at liberty."*

But besides all this, there was in Agrippa what in Felix there was not: the religious impression which he had was also the *third* impression we spoke, an impression on the *will*. There was an acting of persuasion, a state, a feeling of persuasion, and of large consent to that persuasion; "almost thou *persuadest* me." Where was the defect then? It was in the *degree*, in the extent of that persuasion; just in that very circumstance, that he was not "altogether" but only "almost persuaded;" or as it is still closer in the original, "all but a little persuaded." Within a little, just falling short by some small and minute particular, thou hast persuaded me to be a Christian. His mind was fully enlightened. His conscience was broad awake. And his will was largely persuaded, but it was not entirely. So that although his heart at the time was almost converted, almost as nearly as it could be, yet there was a little, and that a fatal impediment. There was one holding back, one secret feeling against the truth, which hindered him from yielding a full and a willing consent to it; which rendered his to be the state in which, our Lord has assured us, none can serve God, the state and experience of a divided heart.†

Now then this case of Agrippa we bring before you, as exemplifying the fourth of our classifications of defectiveness in the matter of conversion, as a case *defective in degree:* that is, right in the kind of religious impression made upon him; right in the manner in which it was made upon him; but defective and wanting in its extent or degree. At the furthest

* Ver. 31, 32. † Matt. vi. 22—24.

point that he attained to, he was only "almost a Christian;" only "almost persuaded." It was still a matter of personal knowledge and conviction, a matter well known to himself, that he was only almost persuaded.

And if there be any that I am addressing, who have the same secret conviction inwardly pressing upon them, in all its painfulness, in all its anxiety and torment, that notwithstanding all their religious habits, their use of means, and their practice of Christian duty, still that the will of their heart, in the strong desires of that will, has never yet been truly converted, never yet set upon the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ:—then it will be for such to follow the enquiry we are going to make into the character before us, in the way of self-comparison, and self-examination. What is then exactly that state which is here described:—To be only almost, but not altogether persuaded to be a Christian?

I. I shall *first* endeavour to show, what is *not* to be considered as being in such a state, though often mistaken for it.

II. And *secondly*, to show, what it *is* that is really meant and described by it; thereby directing the subject to a *close individual application.*

I. In the first place then, there are *two particular states of mind*, in which many persons are, which are *not* the state here described to us, to be only "almost persuaded."

1. And *first*, we are *not* to understand by it, that state in which too many rest contented, or even if discontented nevertheless remain, of *small religious attainment*, of more or less defective religious character.

The state of Agrippa, to be only "almost persuaded" to become a Christian, is not a state of religious attainment, of religious character at all. It is not a degree of Christian progress, or Christian feeling, but it is a degree of nearness to beginning to be a Christian, and therefore, as yet, not having begun to be one. It is to be still an alien from God; still a stranger in experience to even the principles of heavenly life in the soul, however nearly persuaded to seek to attain to it, to begin to set out in the way to heaven.

But the persons we speak of now, have begun to set out in their way. They have been persuaded, quite persuaded to enter upon it, to begin their pilgrimage to glory. They have passed the boundary by which they entered into it. They have gone some little distance, though perhaps very little indeed, and perhaps with a slow and a lingering step. They are therefore Christians and not almost so. They have taken the vows of Christ upon them, believed on his name, and are looking to him for salvation, and so they are Christians, though we say not what sort they are. They are weak Christians, negligent Christians, unfaithful Christians, or backsliding Christians; but still they are not like Agrippa, who was not yet completely persuaded to be a Christian at all.

But, at the same time, brethren, if any of you are in this state; if you are living and walking in such a state of deficiency, then it is a duty to remind you, that in such a state there is room for two uncertainties, or at least for two disquietudes, with respect to your Christian profession.

(1.) There is room for *doubt.*
(2.) There is room for *fear.*

(1.) There is room for *doubt*: that is, doubt if

you are not self-deceivers, and whether, in truth and earnest, you have ever been Christians at all, and ever embraced religion in a really spiritual way. The heart is deceitful above all things; who can know it? And if there is, in your daily experience, a constant coldness and deadness to heavenly things; if there is a guilty negligence becoming habitual with you; if you are always walking in darkness and never have any light; if, when you pray, the heavens are over you as brass, and the clouds are commanded to rain no rain upon you; if when you read the word, that word is a sealed book; if the love of Jesus Christ never kindles within you, and the hope of heaven does not lift you above the cares, the pleasures, and doings of the present evil world:—then I will not say there is, but rather I will ask you, Is there not? Is there not room for doubt, that however you thought you were willing, however you thought you were persuaded, you never were really willing, with a heart decided and a counted cost, to become a Christian at all.

(2.) And then in the next place, if there is room for doubt, much more rather is there room for *fear*. If, I say, in this state of great religious deficiency, there is room to have doubt of the past reality of your turning to God, then there is still greater cause to fear for your future adherence to him; for your future continuance; for your future faithfulness. The way that has yet to be travelled is long and difficult, the enemies to be met are strong and mighty, before you have reached to your journey's end. How shall you ever persevere except the Lord be at hand to strengthen you? And now you are far off from him. Must you not fall in the conflict, if you do not come back very soon to him, who alone is "able to keep you from falling."*

* Jude 24.

Beloved brethren, if you would know with a joyful assurance, that you are not almost but really Christians, then must you walk more close with God, then must you live more entirely by faith, and love, and obedience, on the Lord Jesus Christ. Do this faithfully, and doubt for the past sincerity, and fear for the future victory you will be a stranger to. Then, and not otherwise, it will be certain that, by the power of Christ that worketh in you, you will continue to be a Christian, and be found a Christian at the judgment-day.

2. But again: There is a *second* particular state we must take some notice of as *not* being that exactly which is here described in the text. And that is, the *state of external resemblance;* external, formal resemblance to what a Christian is. As if the text had said, that Agrippa was *very like* a Christian instead of "almost persuaded" to be one: that his was very nearly similar, in many respects, to the Christian mind and character.

There a great many persons who are mistaken by the world, mistaken by the Church, and mistaken by themselves to be Christians, or at least to be very nearly so, because they possess some external qualifications, and do some external works, which resemble those of the true believer. They attend as he does, the means of grace. They abstain as he does, from sinful indulgences. They do as he does, religious doings, they think as he does, religious thoughts, and they talk as he does, religious conversation; and therefore, in some respects, they appear to be like him. But are they so in reality? Surely not: rather as different as light from dark, as the tares from the wheat, as the goats of Satan from the sheep of Christ. They may be like in the eyes of the world, or even of the saints, or of themselves; but they are very different

in the eyes of Him, who calleth his sheep by name, and knoweth them that are his." Are they then "almost Christians?" Nay, they are farther off from being Christians than those who never heard of the Saviour's name. These very works and external doings, they have raised as a wall of adamant to hide the Saviour from them. They have smothered his cross with their own inventions, and, looking always to themselves, have turned their faces away from him.

II. Let us come, therefore, now to our second particular point; what this state, to be only "almost persuaded to be a Christian," really *is*. If it is not to be merely living in a state of *religious deficiency;* for this, as we have seen, is to be in some sort a Christian already, and to have been persuaded already; and if it is not to be *outwardly like* a Christian, that is, in appearance, while inwardly as opposed to it, as the north and the southern pole; what then is it?

It has already been stated, that the text is not speaking of a nearness of resemblance to the Christian character. It is not speaking of resemblance at all. But it speaks of a particular influence upon the will, in order to beginning to be a Christian: "Almost thou persuadest me." Persuasion is an act upon the will. There are, it is true, many souls, in which we might speak of a counterfeit resemblance, and that very near indeed, on the part of the unconverted, to what a Christian is. The outward conduct may resemble. The apparent character may resemble. The spiritual gifts may resemble. But this has nothing to do with our text. The text, when it speaks of "almost," does not speak of the nearness of appearing a Christian to being one, but of the nearness of one that is not a Christian yet, to beginning to be willing to become one. It is the will of a yet unconverted

person, almost persuaded to yield to the force of the preached word, and in fact to become converted.

The subject concerns then all those persons, whoever they are, that have never yet consented, by a positive act of the will, through the grace of Jesus Christ working upon that will, who have never yet consented with all their heart, to come out from a wicked, sinful world, to take the despised profession upon them as Christians or servants of Jesus Christ, and, looking to him for his grace and Spirit to help them, to set out on their way, as pilgrims and strangers, to be with him where he is. And to all such persons it teaches this great and important doctrine. That the substantial reality of being a true Christian is this: the *conversion of the will;* or if you please, that we may use the word as it stands, the *persuasion* of the will: not the almost persuasion, but the quite, the complete, the "altogether" persuasion.

Now all this large and numerous description of persons, who have never yet cordially consented to become converted, and to take the yoke of Christ upon them, may be divided into two classes;

1. Those who *deceive themselves* by thinking that they are willing, that they have experienced this conversion of the will when they really have not:

2. Those who, like Agrippa, *know and confess*, that however near they may have come to it, still it is but "almost;" that their will to repent and follow Christ is only almost, it is not quite converted; that they are not altogether willing. To each of these we must speak.

1. In the *first* place to those who *falsely estimate that they are willing* to belong to Christ, that their heart

is truly turned to him. We must endeavour to describe to you, what a true conversion of the will by divine grace really is.

There are *four* mistakes which may be just briefly mentioned, by which persons deceive themselves into thinking, that they are willing to follow Christ, when in fact, they are not willing.

(1.) In the *first* place there is a mistake in respect of *time.* The will to do the will of God when it is not truly converted, is only an *occasional* will. It is a fickle, inconstant, changing will. It is a thing that is felt at times and seasons, at fits of feeling and particular opportunities. Perhaps under strong excitement. Perhaps under solemn visitations. Perhaps under sermons and other public means. Then, when the heart is softened, and the feelings warmed, there is a working of desire, a wish and a purpose to live the life of faith. But the really sanctified will is a *permanent* and *habitual* one. It is not a sometimes, but an always will. It rules and governs the inner man. It makes it the constant aim and endeavour to please God; to live by the rule of his perfect law; and to seek, by faith and patient waiting upon him, for supplies of spiritual life, and gifts of spiritual grace.

(2.) Then again, another delusion is as to the *extent* of this will. In those who are not in a state of true conversion, it is a *partial,* particular will, not an *entire* and universal one. It will not surrender all which the Gospel calls upon it to surrender. Much perhaps is given up, in some cases very nearly all. But still there is something spared, some carnal indulgence, some worldly pride, some self-sufficiency, some evil temper, or some unlawful gain. They are saying with Naaman the Syrian, "The Lord pardon

thy servant in this thing." But the sanctified will is resolutely striving, and pleading, and seeking, for universal holiness. "Search me and try me, prove me and know my heart, and see if there be any wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

(3.) Then next, there is another deficiency in the will that is still after all in a state of unconversion, as to the *object* of that will. It is willing to attain to the end, but it is not willing to use the means. Religion is sought for by such as a means of peace and a ground of safety, not as a santifying principle; not to make them holy, and like in all things to their Lord and Saviour. Heaven is desired as a state of happiness and bliss, but not because God, not because Christ is there. Grace by the way is wished for because the conscience pronounces it must be had. But it is only a wish. It is not a positive effort. The regular means and duties, in the use of which it is promised, are a great deal too irksome, a great deal too laborious for such to attend to. If a wishing for would get it; or if, under strong excitement and providential visitation, a prayer now and then would obtain it, then they would have it. But now they are satisfied with daily desirings after it; and life is passing away with them, and their hopes are not realized, their desires are not granted nor fulfilled.

(4.) And then the final defect in the unregenerate will is with respect to its *action*. The very best of its action, is a will to possess and attain to a spiritual nature. But the acting of the will that is already converted, is the using that spiritual nature, as already possessed and obtained.

Yes, brethren, here is the principal delusion. Persons are satisfied if they have their desires for a spiritual and heavenly mind, when all the while they

never attain to it. "They have not because they ask not, or because they ask amiss." They think that those desires are a certain proof of grace, and that their will is converted. Whereas the desires that are proofs of grace, are not the desires *for* a spiritual mind, but the desires *of* it; the goings forth of that spiritual mind in longings and thirstings for God himself.

Now then, try by these marks, brethren, whether your will is converted, whether your heart is really and radically turned to God. Is yours not an *habitual* desire that works within you, and permanently rules and controls your character, but an occasional, transitory feeling, ebbing and flowing, and going and coming, and leaving you just where it finds you, when the cause that excites it has passed away? Is yours a *partial*, self-indulgent willingness, that you will be ready to follow your Lord and Saviour, if this or that point of strong besetment may be granted you which his Word has expressly condemned? Is yours a desire to die the *death* of the righteous without the toil and the trouble to live his *life*?" Or a saying, with the Scribe, "Master I will follow thee" when you have not counted the cost of doing so? So that you would have without asking, and find without seeking, and pass the strait gate to heaven, without having striven to enter in? Is yours at the best but a wishing you *could* be holy, and not a thirsting of *present* sanctification, after greater degrees of progres and greater nearness to God? Then yours, it must freely be told you, yours is as yet an unconverted, an unregenerate will. You are yet a stranger to the Christian character, to the Christian privilege, to the Christian life. You are only "almost" a Christian. And that let it be remembered, however near it approach to it, is not to be a Christian at all.

Now then, if peradventure you have not been awake to your true condition, if you have only had some suspicions of it; do not, beloved, continue in such a delusion, do not any longer, we pray you, deceive your own souls. Depend upon this, that the real conversion of the will, the radical change of heart, is the only certain evidence that you are born of God; that you are verily partakers of the grace that is in Christ Jesus, of the power of his resurrection. It is the only Scriptural ground for the full assurance of faith. And unless you feel that you have this, you cannot possibly find religion a means of much happiness, or an actual power to conquer sin. It is the well-grounded conviction that the heart is truly converted, and truly given to God, through the precious blood of Jesus Christ in redeeming it, through his love in drawing and winning it, and his Spirit of grace in sanctifying it; it is this that gives peace to the soul; it is this that fills us with holy love; it is this that stimulates to zeal and exertion; it is this that lifts us above the world, and fits us for heaven, and God, and glory.

2. But finally. Many there are that are *actually conscious*, like king Agrippa, *and willing with him to confess*, that they are still in this unconverted, and, at the utmost they have yet attained to, in this "*almost persuaded*" state. You we must urge, beloved, by all the tremendous risk that you are running, by the solemn interests of eternity that are at stake in it, by the awful certainty that, without this blessed change and renewal, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven; you we must urge and beseech, to seek for a true conversion where alone it can be found. Where is that? "Thy people," says the Psalmist, "shall be made willing in the day of thy power."* "No man can come to me," says our Lord and Saviour, "except

* Psalm cx. 3. John vi. 44, 45, 65.

my Father draw him, except it be given him from above.

Now then meet the necessity, we pray you, in all its certainty of consequence. If your natural will, your carnal, world-loving, pleasure-loving, creature-loving will, is not converted by heavenly grace into a will that has God himself for its object in the Lord Jesus Christ, then, whatever be your forms and your customs, your cares and your prayers, you cannot enter into his kingdon. Time is passing away, and soon that event of your course in this present world, will be fixed and decided upon you. Do not shut your eyes to this fact. Do not place confidence in external things, or the diligent use of external means. But look at your heart. Is it renewed and converted? Is it given to God? Is it the tide of its affections actually turned? Are sin and self, that were once its breath and its nature, now its hatred and abhorrence? Are Christ, and holiness, and heaven, the end which it longs for, and to which it desires to come?

And if you do not find this to be the case, then begin, we beseech you, and pray most earnestly to God that he will do this for you. However you have to seek it, however you wait for it, perhaps with days of labour and nights of tears, do not rest, do not feel yourself at a moment's ease, till you get the will that we speak of, a spiritual, sanctified, converted, holy will. Ask it in faith in the name of the Son of God. Ask it of the Father through the all-prevailing mediation of the Great High-Priest, that sitteth upon the throne. Plead the promise he has given you, "For this I will be enquired of," and then "a new heart will I give you." Then "a new spirit will I put within you. I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh."*

* Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27, 37.

SERMON VIII.

CLASS IV. DEFECT IN DEGREE. SECTION II.

THE YOUNG RULER.

I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. Matt. xix. 24. See also from ver. 16 to ver. 30, and to ver. 16, of chap. xx.

THE circumstance which caused our Lord to make this remarkable observation, was a very affecting one. Amongst the multitude of persons that came to him at different times, and from different motives, some from curiosity, to see his miracles, or to hear his doctrine; some from self-interest, to be healed of their diseases or to eat of the loaves and fishes; and some, on a still worse principle, to watch him as enemies, to cavil at his sayings, and to try to entangle him in his talk: amongst all these applications to Christ, there came to him one, on the present occasion, of a very different, and a much more interesting kind. There came to him one that said to him, What shall I do that I may have eternal life? Surely a most important question, brethren, for all of us to be asking, and getting information about it! Surely the most important question that can ever engage our attention! Surely, in such a dying world as this is, and with eternity before us, and inheritors as we are of a sinful

nature, for which it is appointed to us once to die, and after that the judgment, it is fit we should each of us be asking, What shall I do to be saved? What shall I do that I may have eternal life?

We should expect that such an application, made in the way in which it was made, with so much sincerity, and with apparently so much desire, must have been a successful one, must have ended in his obtaining that eternal life which he was seeking for, and becoming, from that time, a true and faithful follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. But what was the fact? After a most interesting conversation with the Lord, to enable him to count the cost of becoming his disciple, he was unwilling to make the sacrifice required, he could not bring himself to give up the world for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He would not sell all that he had, to buy the pearl of great price. He went away sorrowful into the world again. And he stands on record as an exemplification of that peculiar rule of the Gospel, which our Lord, in the subsequent chapter, drew from his case, that "many are called indeed, but that few are chosen:" or of that Scripture; "*Strive* to enter in at the strait gate," the needle's eye, "for many shall *seek* to enter in, but shall not be able." For then said our Lord to his disciples, when he was gone away sorrowful from them, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

Now here we have a second example of what has been considered in the instance of king Agrippa, the want of a full persuasion, of a sufficient *degree* of gracious influence on the natural will, to bring it to a thorough conversion, and entire surrender to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And in this particular instance, we have two very common and frequent causes un-

folded, of that deficiency of willingness:—the love of this present world and its temporal advantages, and a confined and inadequate view of what religion has to offer instead of it, in the divine privileges and enjoyments which it confers upon the soul. May the Holy Spirit of God open our understandings, and apply it with power to our hearts, that it may serve as a warning to us not to stop short or rest satisfied, till, by the power of God that worketh in us, we have made a complete surrender of ourselves to Christ, both in body and soul, to take up the cross and follow him!

I. The *first* thing which strikes us, in reading the account which is given us of this person, is the *encouraging appearances*: how much there was that was pleasing and interesting in his character, and that seemed to give promise of better things.

1. There was, first of all, his *disinterestedness*. He did not come to the Lord to obtain some temporal boon of him, nor to be healed of some bodily affliction. He only came to enquire of him what was the way of life. Did he come then to make that enquiry, from a selfish and slavish fear, because he was old in years, and drawing near to the end of his days, and saw that death was before him? On the contrary, it is said of him, that he was "*a young man.*"* Was it then that his lot was cast amongst the poor of this world, and that, having little of this world's good, he was therefore more willing to be rich in faith, and to obtain an interest in the world to come? Nay, but it is said that "he had great possessions."† Was it ambition then, for which he wished to be a follower of Christ, as if he hoped it would promote him to honour? Rather we learn from St. Luke's account of him, that he was already, by his position in life, a

* Ver. 20. † Ver. 22.

man of rank and distinction, one of the "rulers;"* whereas the kingdom of Christ, on the contrary, is a "kingdom not of this world."

2. Next, mark his *sincerity*. "*What* good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?" Only tell me, and point it out to me, and whatever it is, I shall set about to perform it. All the commandments I have diligently kept from my childhood. What lack I yet?

3. Mark, too, his *eager desire*. St. Mark, in his account of it, tells us that he came "*running*"† to Christ, and asking him. So anxiously desirous was he to be taught and instructed, and to have rest for his soul! So that when that saying of Christ was too hard for him, he was not able to be happy, but went away from him "sorrowful."

4. And mark his disciple-like spirit in the *reverence* he showed for Christ: he came "*kneeling down* to him."‡ When one of the lawyers once asked the same question of Christ, only to try and entangle him in his talk, What shall I do to inherit eternal life? it is said, that he "*stood up*, tempting him."§ But here, where there was a real desire to learn of him, it was kneeling down and beseeching him, Good Master,—Teacher of that which is good,—tell me what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Now then, surely here was a character not far from the kingdom of God! Yea, it is said by St. Mark, that Jesus himself "beholding him," that is, looking anxiously and earnestly upon him, "Jesus beholding him loved him."‖ My brethren, are you as near to the kingdom of God as he was? Have you felt this eager desire? Have you asked and enquired,

* Luke xviii. 18. † Mark. x. 17. ‡ Ib. § Luke x. 25. ‖ Mark x. 21.

as he did, the way to eternal life? Have you felt as sincerely disposed to do what is needful, and what is required, so that you might obtain it? Is it a fact in your secret history, that you have ever thus run, like the hart to the water-brook, to the Lord Jesus Christ, that he might teach you his way? That you have ever yet in your life, kneeled down to Christ for that purpose, to tell you what you must do? "Lord: what I know not teach thou me." Teacher of good, declare to me, What must I do to inherit eternal life?

If this you have done, brethren, if this has been your experience, then so far it is well. But then rest not in this. You must go farther or you are not safe. All that we have noticed in this young disciple, was not sufficient. "One thing was lacking" to save him, to pluck him as a brand from the burning, to call him out and detach him from an evil world, and to join him effectually and savingly to the redeemed people of Christ. He was indeed, eagerly desirous, and sincere, and conscientious. But desire is not attainment. Sincerity is not conversion. Strict and conscientious obedience to the Law, is not the Gospel disposition of a broken and a contrite heart.

II. We have seen the *encouraging appearances* in his character. Let us notice however in the second place, the *fatal faults* in it: wherein it was that he stumbled, and was wanting, and fell short of the kingdom of God. We discover these faults from all that was said to him by our Lord; which was all of it intended to convict him, and to lay open his own heart to his own observation.

1. The *first* of these faults was the fault of *self-dependence.* You observe that the question which the young man asked of Christ, was plainly the question

of one that trusted in his own heart, and placed his confidence in his own strength. It was not, What grace can be given me? What compassion and mercy can be bestowed upon me? Me a sinner? Me both guilty for the past, and weak and helpless for the time to come? That so I may be pardoned and justified, and receive eternal life as the gift of God? But it was, What shall I *do* for it? What *good thing* shall I *do*, that I may *inherit* eternal life?* Not that I may receive it as a free bestowment, but that I may inherit it as a claim of right, as the due reward of my service.

May I not ask you, brethren, if there are not some among you, that are under this same delusion? When you think of a dying hour, and after that the judgment, and the world to come; and when the enquiry unavoidably arises in your mind, "How shall man be just with God;" do not your thoughts immediately, as it were by a natural impulse, turn back upon yourselves? Not indeed to enquire, Where is there forgiveness? Where is the fountain open for me, a lost, guilty sinner, to wash from my sins and be clean? But rather to justify yourselves. What shall I do for it? I will make my resolutions. I will turn from my sins. I will rigidly keep the commandments. I will fast and pray. I will cry, and cut myself with stones. O what a burthen, my friend, to take upon thyself, when Christ, who has borne it for thee, says to thee, Cast it upon me! Thou that art weary and heavily laden, come unto me, and I will give thee rest! And then I will help thee afterwards to do and to keep the Law. I will give thee my strength; the aid of my Spirit, the power of my grace. I will give thee instead of that burthen I took of thee, *my* yoke which is easy, and *my* burthen which is light.†

* Ver. 16. † Psa. lv. 22. Matt. xi. 28, 29.

2. Along with that fault of self-dependence, which we observe in the character of this young enquirer, there was another which always accompanies it; the defect of *ignorance:* ignorance in the first place, and a blinded understanding, to the *proper character of God,* as a God of grace to his people. He only looked to Jesus Christ as a good Master or Teacher, or as some manuscripts imply, a Teacher of good,* just to point out to him what he must do; as if that were all that were needful, and then he were sure to perform it. But he did not look to Jesus Christ as a giver of grace and strength; as one that was mighty to save him; as able to forgive him his sins, and to give him power to do, what he was going to try for in his own unassisted strength: in short, as God over all, blessed for evermore. He sought him as a Teacher, but not as a Saviour, and divine Mediator. He looked upon him as a Rabbi, but not as the mighty God. And our Lord immediately discovered his ignorance, and the great mistake that he made. And with a view to bring it before him he asks him that question, "Why callest thou *me* good? There is none good but One, that is God." It was not, as the enemies of our Christian faith have said it, to make himself less, or less good than God is, that the Saviour said this. How could it be so? Rather it was just the reverse. It was to lead the mind of him whom he talked with, to the great and important truth of which he was ignorant, that He who was talking with him, was himself no other than the Mighty God. As if he had said, What can be the reason, that thou shouldest call me good? Thou knowest there is none that is good but God. Dost thou mean therefore to say, or to imply it, that I that

* Many ancient MSS. and the Hebrew of Matthew, preferred by Orig. Chrys. August. Beza, Grotius, &c., read the 17th verse thus; Τι με ερωτας περι του αγαθου; The Lat. Interp.—Qui interrogas de bono? Why dost thou ask me concerning the *summum bonum,* the chief good?

speak with thee am God? That thou knowest my deity? Alas! Thou seest it not indeed, but this is the thing thou needest, that thou should perceive it. Surely then thou wouldest not merely ask of me to teach thee what thou must do, but thou wouldest humble thyself before me, to obtain forgiveness, and to sue for power, and grace, and strength, to do and to keep the Law. It was just upon the principle that he presently said to them, "With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

And may it not be asked of you, brethren, if you are not thus in some measure ignorant of the proper character and dignity of the Lord Jesus Christ? The natural tendency of your minds is to consider him, just as the Jews considered Moses, as a prophet or a teacher sent from God, just to tell you what you must do, that *you* may perform it. You look at him, indeed, as the giver of a new revelation, the founder of a new religion; and thus considering nothing but his precepts and commandments, you change the Gospel of grace and of spiritual life, into a carnal law of works and of condemnation. But you do not apprehend the Lord Jesus Christ as the Divine Mediator. You do not cordially receive him as the Godhead-sacrifice for sin. You reverence the goodness of his character, but you do not come to him that you might have life. You do not lay hold of his power, as one that has covenanted, with the name Jehovah in him, to achieve the redemption of his people, both from the curse, and the reigning power of sin; as one that has received in himself all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, that his grace may be sufficient for his people,

* Ver. 26. I add a valuable note from Grotius: Beatam vitam potiusque petrandam quàm impetrandam putaverit, cum ejus dator non sit nisi Deus. Hoc animo *et* Jesum Bonum Magistrum vocabat, i. e. boni monstratorem, et de *bono* ab ipso volebat edocere. At Jesus occurrens huic errori *simulque modestiæ nobis præbens exemplum*, ait non esse multos boni fontes, sed unicum, Deum scilicet.

to restore them effectually to the holy image of God, to be unto them Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption. If this be the case, brethren, then you are dealing with the Lord Jesus Christ just as this young enquirer did. You call him Good, and the Teacher of that which is good, and you ask him to tell you what good thing you shall do. But inasmuch as you do not recognise his proper dignity and Godhead, inasmuch as you rob him of his deity, he may justly say to you, to remind you, Why dost thou call *me* good? There is none good but One, that is God.

3. There was likewise in this character, along with ignorance of the proper dignity of Christ, a great degree of *ignorance of his own state*: he evidently thought himself good and just before God. And our Lord, having likewise hinted at this error in what he said to him, that there is none but God that doeth good, no not one, proceeds to try and to prove him by the touchstone of the law. "But," says he, "if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments: Thou shalt do no murder. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness. Honour thy father and thy mother. And thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."* He used the Law as the school-master, to examine, to convince, to convict him, if peradventure it might bring him to Christ. But the young man splitting on that rock, which so many others have split on, looking only to the outward act of the commandment, and not at its spiritual extent of performance, and not at the motive it must take its rise from, the love of the Father, and of Christ, and the being baptized with the Holy Ghost, splitting on this rock, he says unto Christ, "All these things have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet?"†

* Ver. 17—19. † Ver. 20.

It was true perhaps, that, with respect to the outward service, he had thus kept the commandments. For Jesus beholding him, loved him. He loved his sincere endeavours. He loved his carefulness to obey the law. He loved his perseverance; he had kept it from his youth up. But still in this very thing, his greatest error consisted. He was ignorant of himself, trusting in himself, satisfied with himself. And therefore there was not that absolutely necessary mark of a changed and awakened state, a broken and a contrite heart. There was not that fitness which the Lord requireth, to feel our need of him.

4. And therefore the Lord proceeded to apply to him one test more. For we may further observe;—that the *fourth* and the final deficiency in his character, which at last, when it was discovered to him, drove him from Christ, and shut him out from the kingdom of God, was this: that after all, it was an *imperfect service*. "What lack I yet?" said he. And said Christ to him: "One thing." "One thing thou lackest." And that one thing was the one thing needful. "Go, and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, that thou mayest have treasure in heaven, and then come, and take up the cross, and follow me." This was the test, and it pronounced against him: he was not willing to do it. "He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."* It was then discovered that all his service of obedience, all his keeping of the Law, was an imperfect service. And why was it imperfect? Just for this reason, brethren. It was not an affair of the heart. It was an outward, formal compliance, but not an inward love. So that when the Gospel rule was put to him, "My son, give me thy heart;" when he was commanded to sell all that he had, to forsake, and come out, and be separate from a wicked world, to bear the reproach of the cross,

* Ver. 20, 21, 22. Mark x. 21.

and to follow Christ; then it was found, that he could not do it. He had trusted to his own obedience. But even this, when put to the proof, was found an imperfect service. Weighed in the balance of the sanctuary it was found to be wanting.

1. In conclusion, my dear brethren, do you not detect and discover something of this in yourselves? You are willing to keep the commandments; not, it is true, in the spiritual meaning, or from a spiritual motive, but in the outward act; yea, to be ever so rigid, and ever so strict. You are willing to frequent and attend all the appointed ordinances. And truly, if heaven could be obtained by outward works, nothing would you spare to obtain it. But when the Lord says to you, Give me thine heart, Fix it not on thy possessions; not on thy gratifications; not on thy self-sufficiency; not on thy fleshly lusts, nor on any earthly thing; but come and follow me; return into an affectionate surrender of thyself to God, through my mediation, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself; then do you not feel a reluctance? Do you not find that nothing but genuine love to the Redeemer will ever bring you to do it? Do you not feel a resistance to the demands of Christ upon you? You cannot give up this world, and the spirit of the world that is in you, that you may have treasure in heaven. You cannot make the sacrifices which the Word and the service of Jesus Christ require at your hands. And in proportion as your possessions are great in the world, you cleave and cling to them. And having heard the demand of the Gospel upon you, having counted the cost of surrendering yourself up to it to take the yoke of Christ, you determine at last to reject it, you refuse to have your portion with the saints of Jesus Christ, as pilgrims and strangers upon earth, but for whom an everlasting heaven is provided: you go away sorrowful into the

world again, and walk in its way to an everlasting hell. And so it is fulfilled to you, that "it is easier for a camel," that is to say, for the largest beast of burthen, laden with stores upon it, "to pass through a needle's eye," the narrowest thing which is; than for you, so laden with the weight of your riches, and cares, and possessions, for you, with your heart so full of this present world, to find an admittance into the kingdom of God.

2. Finally, perhaps there are some who are really desiring, notwithstanding all the sacrifice, and all the self-denial it calls them to, there are some who are really and earnestly wishing, to become the disciples of Christ, and, provided only they can do it, to take up the cross, and follow him. You are only afraid that you shall never be able, never have strength to achieve it. Temptations are strong, and many circumstances are against you. The effects of former sins are as bands upon you, and hang as a weight about your neck, so that difficulties and hindrances are on every side. And your heart is mistrustful and faint within you. The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. Now then hear, in conclusion, from the remaining part of this chapter, the strong inducements which our Lord has given you to begin this great and important work.

(1.) In the first place he promises to give you the *help and assistance of his heavenly grace.* Are you saying, in yourself, as those disciples did, at that saying of the needle's eye, when they asked, in a state of "exceeding amazement," "Who then can be saved?"* Then hear the answer of Christ. "With men it is impossible but with God all things are possible." God alone is able to perform it. But he is sufficient, and he is willing to do this. Jesus, our Great High-Priest,

* Ver. 25.

has undertaken the full and complete salvation of all that look to him for it, as a matter of covenant engagement, and of covenant truth. And hard as it may be, with him it is possible, for he is the mighty God: "Why," or rather, Why not, "dost thou call him good; there is but one so, and he is God." He "will give grace and glory." And this is his faithful Word, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy day is so thy strength shall be."* And therefore, brethren, whenever you feel to be weak and drooping, and doubt arises within you, then ask of yourself that question, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" Is any thing too hard for him that is head over all, for a Godhead Christ to do? Could he, when on earth, heal by the word of his power all manner of diseases, and cast out the unclean devils, and raise the dead? And can he not cure my spiritual maladies, and heal my spiritual sorrows, and banish Satan from my soul, and raise me dead in trespasses and sins to a new and heavenly life? Could he speak into calm the stormy winds and tempests, and the winds and the sea obeyed him? And can he not break my strong temptations, and hush, and curb, and tranquillize the raging hurricanes of pride and passion that disturb my soul? Was it his mighty power which made the heavens, the world, and them that dwell therein, and by which he shall at last fold them up as a vesture and they shall be changed? Then can he make me a new regenerate creature, born again of his Spirit. Then can he change my evil heart of unbelief within me, and make it by his grace, believing, true, and clean. He can take the heart of stone from within me, and give me instead of it a heart of flesh. Therefore, let us each of us say: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God."

* Deut. xxxiii. 25.

(2.) And then, *lastly*, that he may induce you to begin this important work, he has given you, not only the promise of his gracious help by the way, but likewise as a matter of grace, the promise at last of a *great and rich reward.* When Peter proceeded to say to him, "We have left all, and followed thee;" then said he unto them, "You that have followed me, in the regeneration,—and every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive here in this world, an hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life."* Here, in the present world, he shall have it fulfilled to him, "The meek shall inherit the earth:" he shall have a cleansed conscience, a peaceful mind, a sanctified heart; a sense of the reconciliation, the love, and the favour of God. He shall obtain hereafter, what this disappointed applicant could not obtain by the outward works of the Law, he shall "inherit eternal life."

* Ver. 27, 28, 29.

SERMON IX.

CLASS V. DEFECT IN CONTINUANCE.

DEMAS.

Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.
2 Tim. iv. part of ver. 10.

IN this remarkable and affecting character, which is here given us of this disciple, we have the *fifth*, and the last that we have to consider, of those particular cases, which are put on record in the New Testament, as *defective* cases of conversion. On the preceding Sabbaths, we have considered the case of Simon Magus, as a case defective in *principle*. He believed and was baptized, and followed about with the disciples, but his heart was not right with God. The same has been instanced in Ananias and Sapphira. We have looked at the case of the second Herod, as a case defective in *practice*. He heard the truth. He was glad when he heard it. He observed its effect upon those who received it. And under the power of the truth he did many things. He enquired after the Saviour. He was long desiring to see him. And when he saw him, he questioned with him, and was exceeding glad. But, notwithstanding this, soon after his first impressions, he fell by evil practice, by the deceitfulness of sin. He became an adulterer. Then a murderer. And then at the last he stood before the Eternal Son of

God, and mocked him and reviled him. Then, in the character of Judas Iscariot, we have noticed the union of both these causes of defectiveness, and traced their procedure from each other. An evil practice from an evil heart. A corrupt tree bringing forth evil fruit. Then we have considered the case of the governor Felix, as a case, defective in *impression*. His mind enlightened by the truth: he had "a perfect knowledge of the way." His conscience shaken and disturbed by it; he "trembled" beneath the word. But his heart a stranger to any effectual, saving, converting impression. And lastly, we examined the character of Agrippa the king, (and that of the Ruler,) as a case defective in *degree*. Not only his outward understanding was informed, so that none of the truth, it is said, was hidden from him. Not only his conscience was engaged and exercised, so that he bore his public testimony to the innocence of St. Paul. But there was also in him, a moving of the heart and affections, a gracious influence on the will. Only, here was the defect. That influence on the will, however considerable, however near to complete persuasion, still was not quite sufficient, still was defective in degree. He was, after all, only within a little, only almost persuaded.

Now then, the case before us, the case of Demas the disciple, we present to your notice, as a case still nearer than all the rest to a saved and converted state. Rightly influenced by religious principle, so as even to have companied with the chiefest apostles, in preaching the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Rightly addicted to holy practice, so as to have given himself up to the sacred and self-denying, and, in those days, the dangerous work, of spreading a despised and persecuted faith. His mind of course enlightened. His conscience of course convinced. And his heart, and will, and affections surrendered to the truth, so that

even his life was devoted to its service. Where then was the defect? It was in his not *continuing*. His character stands, after all, upon record, as a case *defective in continuance*. "Demas hath forsaken me;" and the cause which drew him aside is given us; "having loved this present world."

Both these facts respecting him,—the fact of his *conduct*, his "forsaking" the way, and the fact of his *character*, which was the cause of it, his "having loved this present world,"—both these facts, I say, are proofs and evidences of an unconverted state.

(1.) *First*, his *forsaking the way*, is a proof of unconversion. On this the testimony of Scripture is very positive and express. "They went out from us," says St. John, "because they were not of us. For if they had been of us, doubtless they would have continued with us." "If ye continue in my word," said Jesus once, to those who already "believed" on him, "then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." "We are made partakers of Christ," says St. Paul, "if—if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end." "Abide in me," says Christ, "and I in you, for if a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered." For "the love of many shall wax cold, but he that endureth to the end," he it is that "shall be saved."*

(2.) And then the *cause* why Demas forsook the way, is itself a fearful sign of unconversion: "having loved this present world." For "the friendship of the world is enmity with God. Whoso loveth the world, the love of the Father is not in him."† There is a sense in which the servant of Christ may lawfully

* 1 John ii. 19. John viii. 31, 32. Heb. iii. 6, 14. John xv. 4, 6. Matt. xxiv. 12, 13. † James iv. 4, 1 John ii. 15.

love the world. He may love it as God did, when he desired to save it, and gave his Only Begotten Son. He may love it, as his Saviour loved it, when he came from the height of his glory, to lay down his life for sinners, and open the kingdom of heaven to all believers. In this way a Christian may desire to join in the great and the blessed work of saving, by the knowledge of Jesus Christ, a lost, and ruined, and benighted world. But this was the love with which it was loved by St. Paul, not the love with which Demas, when he forsook St. Paul, loved this present world.*

The state of his mind then, as well as the act of his conduct, proclaimed him, not, it is probable, a deceitful, but a self-deceived, and an unconverted person.

Now the particular point of truth which we seem to gather from this, and which we cannot too much keep in mind, is, that one important evidence of a really converted state is *continuance:* that we are holding fast the truth that has been received by us, and are steadily living by the light of it, and while time is wearing on with us, and life is passing away, and the world and all its concerns are gliding from under our feet, and we are getting continually nearer to the end of our course, still we are running with patience the race that is set before us. We are not making shipwreck of faith. We are not weary of the way. We are not weary of our God and Saviour. We are not weary of his service. We have no desire to leave it. But rather an increasing desire to grow in his grace and knowledge. To walk more closely with

* The strength of the Greek verb εγκατελιπε and the preference implied by the word νυν, I think quite set aside any favourable meaning of the passage, as if Demas were then gone forth from the apostle to preach the word.

him. To endure unto the end. To be faithful even unto death, that we may receive at the last from him, the crown of life.

A very eminent minister of Christ used to assign to his people four evidences by which to examine themselves whether they were in the faith; he called them by these names:

Consistency.
Peculiarity.
Progress.
Continuance.

Consistency,—Or a sacred agreement of character and conduct with the gracious principles of the Gospel, which, if a man be a true believer, are implanted in the soul by the Holy Ghost. Peculiarity,—In that the character of grace is so entirely opposed to the common character of nature, that a man should become conspicuous for just the very opposite tendencies from those which he had by his natural disposition: so that the proud should become humble and meek; the passionate mild and gentle; the unjust, like Zaccheus, should restore fourfold; the covetous be marked for liberality; and the unclean and unholy, be peculiar in notice as the pure in heart. Then, thirdly, the evidence of Progress;—growth in grace. But fourthly, and nothing less absolute than the others, Continuance, abiding in the way, ought ever to stand in the account. For "every plant which the Father hath not planted shall be rooted up:" it is not said immediately, now; but "shall be rooted up at the last." "No man having put his hand to the plough," like Demas, "and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."* But if a person, after a Christian experience of ten, or of twenty or thirty years, can honestly say of himself,

* Matt. xv. 13. Luke ix. 62.

all the commandments I would keep and practise: they are righteous, and just, and good: and all false ways I utterly abhor:—this is the feeling of a true believer.

Now the reason, why so many persons, (for certainly we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that many there are,) the reason why so many persons fall short of continuance and therefore give evidence after all of an unconverted state; the reason why so many turn from Zion's way, is because they have never at the first rightly and savingly entered into it. They have not "entered in at the door, but climbed up some other way." They are found in their rank amongst the sanctified people, but they are not sanctified themselves. They neither possess their character, nor their spirit, nor their privileges, nor their consolations. They have a name to live, but they are dead. And therefore at different periods of endurance, some of them sooner and some of them later, they discover what spirit they are of. They proceed no further. They go out from the people of God that it may be made manifest that they are not of them.

But perhaps we are led to marvel how it comes to pass, that they should ever be joined to the people of God at all, and go so far on their journey with them, and at length, turn back into the world. There are various reasons that may be assigned for it. And these are of course of *two* kinds.

I. There are, *first*, the causes which *move them to it.*

II. And *secondly*, the causes which *draw them from it.*

That is, there are the causes of a *spiritual beginning*, and the causes afterwards of a *carnal end.* We

cannot of course mention all these causes, but take two or three of the chief and prominent.

I. First then, the causes, which move unconverted persons to set out at the first, by a merely carnal beginning, on what they wrongly estimate to be a really spiritual way.

1. The *first* that may be mentioned, as a very common one, one which has done much harm to truth, and driven persons back from religion to a most lamentable degree, is *ignorant excitement*. Persons there are in abundance that hear the word, and even with joy receive it,—but this is the fault, they understand it not. There is no information of the judgment, no work of the mind, no real evangelical instruction on what it is that is declared to them. Their feelings are worked upon by noise and exclamation; but there is not, in all their experience, a single inch of solid ground to stand upon. There is no illumination; no quiet, cautious, gradual, sure imparting of Gospel knowledge, and Gospel truth, to light up a candle in their dark, benighted mind, and so to point out to them the way in which they must be saved. It is a sentimental religion. It is an animal religion. It is an excitement religion. It is a sensitive religion. But it is not a spiritual religion. It is more the effect of external movings than the inward working of the Holy Ghost. The feelings are touched, but not the affections; the fears, but not the conscience. The cry of exclamation is raised, but not the sober, rational enquiry, What must I do to be saved? The tears are made to flow perhaps, by a sort of natural sympathy, but not by a broken and a contrite heart.

What is the consequence?—After a little while, with some alas! very soon indeed, they relapse to their former coldness, their former negligence, their

former sins. This is the only difference: that now, like water that has once been heated, they are colder after it than they were before. Like Demas they turn from the way, and go back to this present world.

2. Then a *second* very frequent cause of these unsubstantial movings towards religion, in those who have appeared to be spiritual persons, is just the converse of that which has been mentioned. It is the *love of novelty*. It is the getting an *outward knowledge* of it, which produces a sense of duty, without a drawing of affection, or a working of real desire. Not *excited ignorance*, but *cold unsanctified knowledge*. Not, as before, the feelings warmed with the mind in darkness. But here, the mind enlightened, but the heart and affections, barren, and cold, and dead. The truth is understood by such persons, but they do not love it, or take delight in it. They have rather been anxious to inform their mind, than to renew and save their soul. Such persons may have got a correct understanding of the Gospel plan. They have got it from the writings of pious authors, or by attending the preaching of pious ministers, or even from reading the Holy Word itself. There are many who do all this from custom, or duty, or curiosity, or imitation, or for the sake of example to others, that are dependant upon them.

What is the end of it? After the novelty wears away, the interest ceases, and the desire to know is at an end. Then they sink at the last into a state of apathy, and complete indifference. Then they discover, that after all their labour, the main concern is wanting. It is only the head, but not the heart; only the knowledge of the truth, not the power, the grace, the love. There is one want still, and that is every thing. There wants the Spirit. It is the shell without the kernel, the ear without the corn in it, the body with-

out the soul. The doctrine is right. The understanding is correct, but they cannot shut their eyes to the fact, that their's is a Christless religion in a Christless heart. And as the heart is not engaged in it, and as the heart of man is so constituted, that it must have an object to fix on, soon, like Demas, they forsake this miserable system; the world with its snares allures them; and they go their way into the world again.

3. I shall mention one more cause of these apparently spiritual beginnings, which in the end and issue do not last and continue. It is the cause of *educational habits*. Parents of families train their children to religious habits, religious views, and by religious discipline. It is their duty to do so. They wish to communicate to them the hope which they feel and enjoy themselves. They train them to all that is lovely, and virtuous, and of good report. They employ them in works of piety and mercy, and delight to see them in such employ. I am speaking, of course, of Christian and pious parents. For alas! what numbers there are, who have any thing else than such wholesome customs; who, instead of caring for their children's souls, and showing them and teaching them the way to heaven, are wilfully ruining their hope of salvation, taking them with them in the way to hell! Still even these that we speak of, however they teach their children, are not able to give them grace; are not able to change their heart. And therefore, in many, there is only an educational religion. There are the fruits in appearance, but not the root of the matter; the works without, but not the principle within.

What is too frequently the issue? They leave in time the paternal roof. They come to act for themselves, in the wide and busy world. The parent eye that had watched them is closed, and the tongue that

had warned them is silent in the grave. The sun of their bright example is set. It will shine on them no more till the judgment-day: then perhaps to bear witness against them, to seal and to add to their condemnation. Now, by the cares of the world, the snares of the devil, and the strong delusions of sin, those who, in earlier life, appeared to be lambs of the spiritual flock, are gone away from the Shepherd, and lost in the wilderness of this present world. And if the glorified spirit of their pious parent could utter its sentence respecting them, it might justly say of them, as St. Paul here said of Demas, Such an one hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.

These are some of the causes, which move considerable numbers of those who are only carnal and unregenerate, to set out nevertheless at the first, along with the people of Jehovah, as Demas did, in an apparently spiritual way.

II. Many also are the causes which may be assigned, which *draw* them afterwards *away from* that course, at less or at greater continuance, and bring them at last to a *carnal end.* There are all the devices of Satan, the watchful enemy of souls. He "goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." He "catcheth away the word that is sown in their hearts." He strikes their souls with his "fiery darts." There are the temptations of the world, and the afflictions of religion. This was the case with Demas: he "loved this present world." As the Lord described of the seed among the thorns; "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of its riches, and honours, and pleasures choke the word." And, it is also implied, he feared and shrunk from the afflictions of the people of God, which he saw his companions, St. Paul and others, enduring: as it is said of the stony ground hearers; "when tribulation or persecution ariseth

because of the word, by and by they are offended." There is also the evil heart within them. There is the length and weariness of the Christian way. There is the distance of heaven from the view. There is the presumptuous, careless confidence, the natural coldness and unbelief, of the unregenerate, unconverted mind.

Thus in a little they turn away. The delusion comes to an end. The character, raised for a little above the world by false and external impulse, and not by the power of heavenly grace, returns to the world again, like as a stone which is thrown into the air, as soon as the force is spent which propelled it, falls again upon the earth.

II. But now, in the *second* place, we are ready to ask and enquire, What must a person possess then, in his Christian experience, that will entitle him humbly and confidently to believe, that he shall, through the grace of God, continue, and hold on his way, and be faithful unto death? There are many particular pledges and earnests of this, which might be mentioned, but chiefly *four:* Contrition, and Faith, and Love, and Holiness. If a person really possesses these, then there is good and reasonable hope, that he will never, like Demas, forsake the Lord that died for him, through the "love of this present world." For contrite, godly sorrow worketh carefulness, indignation, fear, desire, jealousy, self-revenge.* It gives a man a watchful and tender conscience, and leads him, distrusting himself, to lean on the Lord for strength. And again, the mischief with Demas was, that the world overcame him, whereas this is the character and state of a believer, that he overcometh the world; for "this is the victory that overcometh the world,

* 2 Cor. vii. 11.

even our faith."* And again, as St. John declares that if any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him, the converse must also be true, that if any man love the Father, he has not, as Demas had, in a guilty sense and degree, the love of this present world. And again, "holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling:" ye "have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."†

Now then, do you, beloved brethren, find in your own experience, the humble, sin-afflicted, broken, contrite heart? And do you, in a Scriptural and spiritual way, believe on the Son of God? And is it a faith which works by love? not that sort of natural faith, which is nothing but a formal assent of the mind to what is revealed concerning him: this is what St. James calls "a dead faith, which does not justify;" and what St. Paul says, "profiteth us nothing." But have you that faith on the Son of God, which is spoken of when it is said, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness?" Try it by its fruits. Try it by the things which are said of it. It "purifieth the heart." It "worketh by love;" "to you which believe Christ is precious." "It overcometh the world." It is the "substance of things that are hoped for, the evidence of things that are unseen."‡

Where there is this faith in the heart, and where there is the ground of it, tender sorrow for sin, and where there is the fruit of it, a holy love to the Redeemer, then there is ground for assurance, that such an one will continue, and hold the beginning of his confidence firm unto the end. "If these things be in you, ye shall never fall, but an entrance shall be minis-

* 1 John v. 4, 5.
† Heb. iii. 1. Rom. vi. 22.
‡ James ii. 24, 26. I Cor. xiii. 2. Rom. x. 10. Acts xv. 9. Gal. v. 6. I Peter ii. 7. Heb. xi. 1.

tered to you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."*

And a person that examines his own heart, and looks at his private history, cannot well be mistaken, whether he has these things or not. Do this, therefore, brethren. Examine your own selves. Look to your secret experience. It cannot be a matter unknown to your recollection, whether you ever have fled for refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the hope set before you in his Holy Word: whether with a sense of your own iniquity and danger, you have looked to him as your sacrifice, and the propitiation for your sins. And if you have done this in simplicity and humble reliance, this is repentance, and this is faith. And it cannot be a matter unknown to you, whether the love of Jesus Christ is a moving principle within you. The heart must know with a certain knowledge, its own position and exercise in this respect. Examine the matter then, without delay, and come to some conclusion upon it. And if you have really come to Christ as a sinner, renouncing all other dependance, and found the forgiveness of your sins; and if, in simplicity and godly sincerity, you feel and know that you love him much, because that much is forgiven you; if these things be in you;—then here is a pledge that you are not a self-deceiver, but really born of God. "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye believe in God, believe also in Christ. He is preparing a place for you. If it were not so, he would have told you. And yet a little while, he will come again, and receive you to himself."

But if, upon examination, you feel you have not these things; that faith in the Son of God, that love to the Son of God, are principles to which you are a stranger, then, as you value your soul's salvation,

* 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

seek for those gifts, without delusion or delay! For out of those gifts, brethren, no man can be saved. Out of those gifts, that is, out of Christ, God is to all a consuming fire. For this is the testimony of the Scripture, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." And "if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, he shall be Anathema Maranatha: the wrath of God abideth on him."*

Proposing to make these four evidential graces, Godly Sorrow, and Faith, and Love, and Holiness, in an after part of this course of sermons, the particular subject of four discourses of enquiry, I leave for the present any further application. The Lord enable us all to seek that sacrifice which he will not despise, which Christ is exalted, as a Prince and a Saviour, to give to his people; that gift of God, of which Christ is the Author and Finisher, and that heavenly and holy temper, for which Christ has declared to his people, and will declare, the Father, that the love, wherewith He hath loved Christ, may be in them, and Christ in them.†

* Heb. xi. 6. 1 Cor. xvi. 22. John iii. 36.
† Psa. li. 17. Acts v. 31. Eph. ii. 8. Heb. xii. 2. John xvii. 26.

SERMON X.

PART II.

DOUBTFUL CASES, AND TESTS.

NICODEMUS, JOSEPH, GAMALIEL.

Among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. John xii. 42, 43.

WE are noticing, in regular succession, those different particular cases of different individuals, related to us in the New Testament, which bear, in different respects, upon the great and momentous subject of a soul's conversion to true religion. I have divided those cases, as they always must be divided, into three sorts; *Defective, Doubtful,* and *Real:* that is, Those which certainly and beyond a question fell short of spiritual conversion, at different degrees of approach to it, and from different kinds of deficiency: Those who lived, by their own conviction, and whose character and conduct marked them to others, uncertain and doubtful whose they were, and where their course at the last should terminate; weak, and timorous, and unstable souls: many there are, and there have been in every age, who do thus pass through the troubled sea of this trying, and difficult, and tempting world, in sorrow, and darkness, and doubt, and

fear; many of their number have been shattered and wrecked by the way, but some of them, tossed to and fro for a season, at the last have just weathered the storm, and are safely landed on the heavenly shore: Those, in the third place, who did, in divine reality, find their way to the Saviour; whose heart and mind were truly, and consciously, and delightfully brought under the power of his grace; who could not be satisfied with a distant worship, or a distant hope, a half acceptance, or a divided heart; but like the woman that came to the Lord and touched him, and felt within herself that her plague was healed, so they came to Jesus Christ. They pressed on their way till they came to him. They were truly and powerfully turned from darkness to light, and translated from the bondage of Satan into the glorious kingdom of God's dear Son.

It is surely a duty of self-examination, that each of us frequently ask ourselves, to which of these characters we belong. Are we those who are certainly unconverted, however near to an escape from that sad condition? Are we those who are really partakers of a divine renewing, and therefore assured that we are, by a true and living faith, the saved people of Jesus Christ? Or are we those who are so little moved by the truth as it is in Jesus, or so much blinded by a false estimation of ourselves, that we cannot feel sure, upon good and scriptural ground, or others feel sure concerning us, whose we are, whom we serve, where we are going, or what will become of us when we die?

To assist in this enquiry, we are taking, in succession, those individual cases, which respectively belong to each of these descriptions of character, and which illustrate what they are. And we have now completed our notice of the *First Part* of this enquiry,

those *five descriptions of defectiveness*, of different kinds and degrees, in *eight* particular cases, which serve to exemplify to us how it is that it happens, that some, even hopeful and promising characters, do yet, to an awful certainty, fall short of the kingdom of God. So that now to sum up those cases, in the way of self-application, we may say to you, brethren, with a strong and positive assurance, that if your state, with respect to revealed truth, is like to that state of Simon, (or the similar one of Ananias,) "baptized, believing, wondering, and continuing," but all the while, your "heart not right in the sight of God;" as it is strongly expressed by a late very eminent writer, "Many great services have been performed, many glorious works are wrought by men, which yet are utterly rejected by God, and shall never stand upon record in order to an eternal acceptation, because they took no heed to keep their hearts with God in those duties;" if this is your state, brethren, then it cannot be a state of evangelical conversion: Or if, like Herod, or Judas, in the midst of religious means, and opportunities, and feelings, and enjoyments, you are living in the practice of moral sin: Or if, like Felix, your mind is enlightened to "a perfect knowledge" of the truth, and your conscience "trembles" under it, but your heart is not drawn nor affected by it: Or if, like Agrippa, or the Young Enquirer, you are only "almost persuaded;" your will is not thoroughly turned, however nearly it be so; you shrink from the test which is given you, "Take up the cross, and follow me:" Or, if you have *all* these different qualifications, but still, like Demas, you have not abided and persevered in them, but have "forsaken" the way, "having loved this present world:"—then, I say, we must say to you, with a strong and positive assurance, then you are not converted; you are yet a stranger and an alien to the inward work and experience of saving, regenerating, sanctifying grace.

But perhaps, upon close examination, you are not exactly authorised to pronounce this against yourself, that you are in a state of certain and positive unconversion, and therefore in certain danger of final condemnation. Then we have next to remind you, that next to that state of *certain danger*, there is also the state of *uncertain safety*, and therefore of fearful and doubtful risk. Is it then a matter of doubt with you, and are you content that it should remain so, whether or not you have fled for refuge to the hope set before you in the Gospel, and are saved and delivered, by a real salvation, from the present evil world? Then, next we must say to you, and prove and testify it, as the *Second Part* of our subject,—that of all the dangerous uncertainties, in which a human being can be, in the present uncertain existence, surely this is the worst and the most adventurous. A man may have all his worldly property risked in some doubtful speculation. A man may not be able to tell, as to earthly things, what a single day may bring forth to him. He may be uncertain of health for a single hour, or what shall befal him, or how long he shall live, or perhaps how soon he may die. But who would be doubtful, who would be out at risk, what shall be the final end of his pilgrimage, and the state of his soul in the world to come? Who would be in darkness, when he might be in peaceful assurance, what shall become of him after death, and where he is going to, when he must leave this world? I shall therefore endeavour to make these *Doubtful Cases*,—these doubtful cases of conversion, the subject of *one* discourse:* "Among the chief rulers," says our text, "many believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; but because of the Pharisees

* By way of completing this Second Part, upon Doubtfulness of character, I have also appended to this, four other sermons, on the principal points of evidence, viz. on the four chief characteristics of spiritual religion, (see page 124,) in order that it may be better competent to "them that read," to enter thereafter on the cases of Real Conversion, in the Second Volume of the Work.

they did not confess him: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

It is not known to us who all of these rulers were; but three of them are mentioned in other parts of the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles. They are mentioned in such a way, as to lead us to calculate, that they were the characters here referred to. One was Nicodemus. Another was Gamaliel. Another was Joseph of Arimathea. These were all of them amongst the chief rulers; that is, they were counsellors, members of the senate, or, as it was called, the Sanhedrim. Nicodemus is called a "Pharisee," a "ruler of the Jews," a "master in Israel." He is three times mentioned. He "came to Jesus by night." He ventured to speak in a sort for the Lord in the Sanhedrim, and the question was presently put to him, "Art thou also a Galilean?" He came with Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple, to bury the body of Christ. And, if we can trust the tradition of the Church, he was finally beaten by the Jews, and driven out of the council,* and hid by his uncle Gamaliel, on account of the Christian faith. Gamaliel was also a "ruler," a "Pharisee," a member of the "council," and a "doctor of the law." He was the teacher of St. Paul. He stood up in the council, and spake a word for the apostles; "if their work be of men, it will come to nought, but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it: refrain, and let them alone." Tradition also informs us of him, that he buried the martyr St. Stephen, and buried his nephew Nicodemus by St. Stephen's grave.† Joseph of Arimathea was also a ruler of the Jews. He is called a "counsellor," and a "rich and honourable man." He had not "consented" to the deed of the council in the death of Jesus Christ. He "buried the body of Jesus," and is de-

* Photius Cod. 171. John iii. 1, 2, 10.—vii. 48—52.—xix. 39.
† Lucian de St. Steph. invent. Acts. vi. 34, 38, 39.—xxii. 3.

clared to have been "his disciple;" but then it is also said of him, that he was that disciple "secretly for fear of the Jews."*

Now then these were the rulers that believed in the name of our Lord, but did not confess him, for fear of the rest of their sect. With all their degrees of attachment to him, they "loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." Whether we can trust the tradition that all of them were converted, and that one of them, Joseph of Arimathea, died as a martyr to the Christian faith, is of course a matter of doubt. Gamaliel appears, as far as we read of him, to have been the farthest off from the truth. Joseph appears to have been the nearest, for it is positively said of him, that he "also waited for the kingdom of God." But still they all of them stand before us in the Word, not as decided, bold, devoted Christians, but as persons of whom there is room to doubt. So that when their doings are read by us, the mind unavoidably connects with their history, a sort of uncertain feeling as to their true character.

Many and great are the causes which render it doubtful, in ordinary cases, whether any individual person is a true disciple of Jesus Christ. But to confine ourselves to the particular cases before us, those of these rulers of the Jews; the causes of doubt, as to being a true disciple of Jesus Christ, are principally *three*.

I. *The doubt of adherence.*
II. *The doubt of knowledge.*
III. *And the doubt of character.*

I. There is, first, the *doubt of adherence*: that is, the doubt which arises, and must arise, in the mind,

* Mark xv. 43. Luke xxiii. 50, 51. John xix. 38.

when a person has not the courage, for the sake of that Saviour that loved him, and died for him, to confess his name before men, to tread in his steps, and to bear his cross. This was the case with each of these Jewish senators. Nicodemus came secretly by night to Jesus. Joseph was secretly his disciple. Gamaliel spoke for the apostles, and Nicodemus for the Lord, in a cautious and compromising manner. "If this matter be of God," said Gamaliel. And said Nicodemus, "Doth our law condemn a man before he is heard?" They were none of them known in the Sanhedrim as the followers of Jesus; they were only suspected; as when it was said to Nicodemus, "Art thou also a Galilean?" They believed in Christ, but they did not confess him. And why did they not? There could be no other reason than that which is assigned, "they feared the Jews:" they feared the shame, and they feared the loss, excommunication and confiscation. "They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

My friends, is it in this way, that you are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ? You are willing to belong to him, and to share in what he has to bestow: yea, and it may be, you wish to revere and honour him, and to have your character brought to a sacred resemblance to his. But you dare not confess him. You dread the contempt of a proud, conceited world. You dare not openly confess him. You are willing to be thought and esteemed, in a sort, a religious professor: that is, that you support, by conduct and by example, the established services of a Christian land. You are regular and constant in this, although even this, it is true, others, in multitudes, laugh at and turn to ridicule. But this, my friends, is not the cross of Jesus Christ. This is not confessing him. This is respectable. This is an honour to private character, and not a stigma against it: it is lov-

ing the praise of men, after all, and not the praise of God. Well enough it is known to you, that there is no reproach of the cross in this. The reproach would be greater for an opposite course, from good and honourable men. But are you willing, we ask you, to take a much higher, a more decided stand? to come out and be separate from all the habits and sinful indulgences of a wicked ungodly world? to bear your protest against its follies, its fashionable vices, its dissipating pleasures, and its carnal cares? Are you willing, in such a world, to be called an enthusiast, a saint, or a fool for Christ? Can you make your determination,—Let others do as they will, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,—we will not have worldly customs, worldly pleasures, worldly associations, nor worldly education,—we will walk in the narrow way,—we will keep our garments lest they be defiled,—we will not touch the polluted thing,—we will make it our daily endeavour, by the lamp of God's Word to our feet, and his throne of grace to help us, to follow our crucified Master, to walk as he walked, to live as he lived, and to do as he did in the world?

If you have not this determination, then, my friends, whatever other marks, desires, or feelings you possess, you cannot be certain that you belong to Jesus Christ. It is, and it must be, a matter of strong and perpetual doubt.

2. Secondly. In doubtful and questionable characters as to the point of conversion, it will for the most part be found, that there is a reasonable doubt on the score of *religious knowledge*. They do not know, understand, and believe the truth, as the faithful and spiritual people do. They may perhaps know it with a similar correctness, but not in a similar manner, not in a similar spirit, nor with the same peculiar dispo-

sition. They cannot receive the truth in the love of it, because they have not the discipline of mind which would dispose them to receive it. Thus we find Nicodemus coming to learn of our Lord: not like another disciple, in a docile, teachable mind, to sit and worship at his feet, but to answer and reply to him, "How can these things be?" and to get this rebuke in return, "If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things?"* And therefore we find that he was ignorant of the principal features of Gospel truth,—the spiritual birth of the soul,—and the purpose of atonement and redemption, for which the Lord had come into the world.† And thus we find Gamaliel, the learned doctor of the law, unable to solve the question, whether the doctrine were of God.

And is there not something of this with some of those I am now addressing? with those I mean that have had some careful thoughts about the soul and eternal things? Have you not, brethren, discovered that there is in revelation, a something you cannot get into, a secret you cannot find? that you hear it by the hearing of ear, but you cannot perceive and understand it? Some of its vital and saving principles are parables and hard sayings to you, and sayings you cannot receive. You cannot at least discover that beauty in them, which a spiritual mind discovers, nor humbly love them, and ardently delight and rejoice in them, as the faithful people of Jesus do. The work of redemption by the death and blood of Jesus Christ;—salvation as a sovereign gift by faith alone;—the need of a change of heart;—the mode of that change of heart by the power of heavenly grace;—and the life of faith;—and the walk of faith;—and the power of love;—and the rejoicing in Christ with joy unspeakable and full of glory;—these are hard sayings.

* John iii. 9, 12. † ib. ver. 3, 13—17.

You have not experienced what they are. You have never felt them, nor known their value. And therefore you are ready to say of them with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?"

If this is the present state of any to whom I speak, then here again there is room for doubt, whether you belong in reality to the faithful people of Christ, and are indeed partakers of his converting grace.

3. One point more. There is, in the most of such cases as those which have been described, doubtful cases of conversion, there is, chiefly of all, the *doubt of character*. It is here, after all, that the true believer is most distinct from others. The people of God are "a peculiar people." They are "called to be saints." There are many peculiar marks by which they are known, and by which they cannot be mistaken. There is a bruisedness of spirit. There is a penitent, humble mind: it practically says of them, and writes as it were, upon their forehead, "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath."* There is a subdued and chastened conversation. There is a watchfulness of conduct. There is an evident habit of self-examination, of inward discipline, and, when they have erred, of self-reproach. There is a tenderness of conscience. There is a quietness of demeanour; "a behaving themselves as a weaned child." There is a sanctified course of desires, a spiritual appetite, and an upward eye. They cannot talk much about earthly things. There is in them a holy simplicity, a godly sincerity of mind, a purity and innocence of character, a spirit of love and charity to God, to the Church, and to all mankind.

We see not this in Nicodemus, and those rulers of the Jews. It may have been there but we do not per-

* Lam. iii. 1.

ceive it. If it had been so, it must have marked them to the rest of the council, as followers of the Lord. For "by their fruits ye shall know them." And therefore again we say to you, If you have not these marks of peculiar character; if you are not actually living as saints in the world, or at least are not caring to do so; if you have not these fruits of the Spirit, by the work of the Spirit within you, "love, and joy, and meekness, and gentleness," and above all, a contrite, holy, and humble mind;—for such is the character of saints;—then, at the best, it is doubtful, whether or not you have experienced that blessed change, by which a sinner is converted, and turned from sin to righteousness, and from the power of Satan unto God. Not that any of these things are the ground of acceptance and peace with God, but as they are the fruits of his grace and Spirit, so they are evidences of it, and so if we have them not, it is a fearfully certain mark, that the Spirit is not in us.

Is this, therefore, beloved brethren, the condition of any among you, that you really are, and must admit yourself to be, in a state of uncertain and doubtful character, with respect to the work of converting grace within you? Then it behoves us, in drawing this discourse to a conclusion, to urge and implore you, by all that is worth your seeking for, not to remain in this dark and unsafe condition: not to give sleep to your eyes, or slumber to your eyelids, till you have decided that great and important question, so well expressed by a well-known Christian writer;

"Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I his, or am I not?"

and if the decision should be against yourself, and we charge and entreat you to be faithful in the verdict you come to, then to determine, that by the grace of Almighty God, you will not rest contented till you find your way to the Redeemer, and to that peaceful,

joyful confidence, which you see is enjoyed by his faithful worshippers. We urge you, therefore, to awake, and arise from this doubtful state, by *two* considerations:

1. *First*, by its *great and trying disadvantages*. There is scarcely a single religious exercise, which a doubtful mind does not spoil and hinder, like a worm in the bud, or rottenness in the bones. It takes away the life and the power of prayer: for the principal requisite for prayer is faith: "Whatsoever ye ask, believing, ye shall receive;" but here is a state of doubtfulness and misgiving. It almost entirely stops the noble exercise of praise: for how shall you offer praise, an act, as it is, of joyful confidence, when your soul is cast down, and your heart disquieted within you? It mars the delightful exercise of searching the Word of God, and prevents it from drawing the affections, and filling the heart with grateful love: for the gracious promises which the Lord has given to his saints, to win their love to him, this doubtful mind is afraid to feed upon, lest haply they are not intended for it: it haunts the mind continually, and says of promise after promise; Presumptuous sinner, that promise is not for thee! It stands as a brazen wall between the Saviour, and the soul: for in order truly to rejoice in him, and feel the union to which the soul is invited with him, we must be able to say with the Church of old, "My beloved is mine, and I am his;" but this it is plain the doubting, timorous, unbelieving spirit, can neither say nor yet dare to feel.

In short, it blunts the energy for duty. It chills the religious affections. It makes the heart sad and sorrowful. It deadens all ardent and active zeal for the blessed work of the Gospel, in extending the knowledge of salvation, and establishing the kingdom of Jesus Christ in the world. And, beloved brethren, if

you should so continue till life is ended, what will it be to doubt when you come to die? What will it be to be uncertain, when your eyes are closing for ever upon this visible and material world, where, the next moment, they shall open; in the presence of God and of Christ in heaven, or else for ever and ever, in the hopeless regions of the damned in hell! Who that is wise would not give, with a cheerful compliance, the whole of this perishable world, to have, in that hour, the sting of death taken from him? to be able to say, with a certain confidence, "I know in whom I have believed;" and therefore, "O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?"

2. *Finally* then, we urge you to come forth from this state of doubt and uncertainty, by the *absolute needlessness* of it. Why should you resolve to suffer such a painful state of mind to oppress you, when the Lord declares himself ready to save and deliver you from it? The Gospel offer is to conduct you to the "full assurance of faith;" and the souls of the faithful saints have ever proved it and found it true. "Lord, I am thine," says one of them, "thou art my portion, therefore will I hope in thee." "We know," says another, of himself and his fellow-disciples, "we know that we are of God, and have passed from death unto life." "There is," says another, "laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord at that day shall give me." "In whom," says another, of himself and the saints at large, "in whom," that is in Christ, "though," it is true, "we see him not, yet believing we rejoice, with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving," *now* receiving,* "the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls."

Brethren, follow this example. Receive the word:

* Gr. κομιζομενοι. pres. part.

and in the strength of Jehovah, believe, determine, and begin. "Lift up the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees." Give your heart to the Lord. Make your covenant with him, to be his for ever and ever. Rest your all upon his faithful promises. And then, "rejoice in the Lord, and again I say rejoice."

SERMON XI.

TESTS OF TRUE RELIGION.*

I. GODLY SORROW.

The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart: and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Psalm xxxiv. 18.

IT is one of the great impediments to the progress of true religion, that the professing people of God are so little marked and distinguished, as they ought to be, by a holy and gracious character, from the rest of the world around them. The trumpet gives an uncertain sound. The light of the world is under the bushel. The salt of the earth is without its savour. The city of God is not set, as it ought to be, on the hill. There is plenty of vain and ill-founded pretension to the name and dignity of the saints of Jesus Christ, without their inward and holy character. There is plenty of the Shibboleth of party-spirit:—those that have a doctrine, a tongue, a revelation, or an interpretation. There are plenty of different sects and divisions, which are each of them saying, while excluding others from community, "The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, The Temple of the Lord are we:" whereas this very spirit is that which excludes themselves, for it is the very spirit of the world, and not the spirit which is of God.

* See Note page 123, and page 124.

But if a man, who should be brought, we will say, under the strong awakening influence of the Holy Spirit, should begin to enquire after God, after the way to God, and not only so, but after the people of God, as his appointed fellow-pilgrims in the way; where shall he find that people? How shall he know that people? Who shall that people be? If he reads their description in the Word, that they are "a spiritual house," a "chosen generation," a "royal priesthood," a "holy nation," a "peculiar people,"* and then looks round and compares it with the world, or the Church, around him; where, I say, shall he find them? O how completely different from what commonly passes for them, how little in man's esteem, how small in notoriety, how few in number will they be! True it is that their light does shine before men, for it is appointed to do so; but not with that noisy, and troublesome, and self-sufficient declamation which we so often see. It is a quiet witness for God, a living martyrdom for their Lord and Saviour. Like him, as their bright example, they do not strive, nor cry, nor cause their voice to be heard in the streets.† And many of them, probably, are altogether hidden by him, and sheltered in his pavilion, from the infidel gaze of the world around them. The seal upon God's foundation is "The Lord," not man, "knoweth them that are his."‡

But whatever other marks there may be, as doubtless there are many, by which the people of God, whom he has loved and chosen in Christ, are marked in this world, there will, at all events, *Firstly*, be those *two*, which are laid down for us in this text: "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit:"—that is, that all true saints may be known, if they are care-

* 1 Pet. ii. 9. † Isa. xlii. 2. ‡ 2 Tim. ii. 19.

fully observed, as the peculiar people, by *two* peculiar things:

I. By their *peculiar sorrows:* they are persons of a "broken heart, and of a contrite spirit:"

II. By their *peculiar consolations:* "the Lord is nigh unto them, and saveth them."

Let us look at each of these particulars.

I. We consider, in the *first* place, the peculiarity of the people of God, that they have *peculiar sorrows* which others have not: in that all true believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, are persons of a "broken heart and of a contrite spirit." This sorrow which is peculiar to believers, to the spiritual seed, is of *three* kinds; it arises from three causes. I say that which is *peculiar* to believers:—for I speak not of those afflictions, in which their lot is the same as that which is common to man:—the personal sufferings, and relative bereavements, and providential disappointments, and painful separations, and pecuniary losses, and difficulties, and changes, and trials of life:—the multiplicity of avenues, for grief and suffering, in mind, and body, and estate. In these it is more or less, and sooner or later, the same with all the race, that "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." But I speak of the sorrows peculiar to believers; that is, those which the evil world knows nothing of: and these, I say, are of three particular kinds.

1. There is first a *penitential sorrow.* In every true believer there is, by the work of God's Holy Spirit within him, a *penitential sorrow;* a godly sorrow for sin; what is called in the text, "a contrite spirit." Depend upon it, there is no exception to this;—that all true believers in Jesus Christ, every one of them, are persons of a contrite spirit. They are those that

"sow in tears:" that is, the incorruptible seed of the Word in them is watered by their tears; and because they do this, they shall "reap in joy." "Going now on their way weeping, while bearing that precious seed, they shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, and bring their sheaves with them."*

Now what is it to have a contrite spirit? The word literally signifies, to be *crushed* or *bruised*;† as when a hard or rugged substance is, by a course of pressure or friction, or other means, made to be smooth, and soft, and flexible: like the corn that is ground to powder between the upper and the nether mill-stone. Just such a process, in a spiritual sense, is that which passes, by the discipline of true repentance, upon the soul of the believer. It is cast into the press of the two great mill-stones, sin and the Law. It falls upon the one, upon sin, and is broken, and the other, the Law, falls upon it, and "grinds it to powder."

The sinner discovers and feels his sins: "I have sinned, What shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?" The guilt of a broken law, as a ministration of death and condemnation, presses hard and heavy on his soul. And the pride of the heart is broken; and the rebel character of the natural, sensual mind, that felt itself all-sufficient, and independent of Jehovah, is crushed and subdued; and a sense of the guilt of a careless and carnal life is imparted to the mind by the Holy Spirit; and conviction is fastened on the conscience; and grief is excited in the heart: the tears of repentance begin to flow: the cry of enquiry arises, What must I do to be saved? and the cry of distress and of entreaty arises, God be merciful to me a sinner!

* Psa. cxxvi. 5, 6.

† Heb. דכא or דכה, attrivit; see Num. xi. 8.

But this, brethren, is not the whole of contrition, of *penitential sorrow*. There are many who feel all this, in a merely natural way. It is natural, when sin is discovered, to fear for its consequence. It is natural to wish to be saved, and that God will be merciful to pardon sin. Contrition is more than this. What is it then? It is to see the nature of sin, and to feel the nature of sin, in the believing contemplation of the death and agony of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the contrite sorrow of every true believer. He is brought, by divine grace, to see the exhibition of sin in the bleeding body of Jesus Christ. He sees his own individual sins, borne by the Just for the unjust, in that body on the tree. He sees them freely forgiven him, knows that they are forgiven him, through that voluntary sacrifice. And he mourns for those sins, because he mourns for Jesus Christ. He looks at the guilt of his transgressions, and the base ingratitude of his remaining daily sins, and then he looks at Mount Calvary, at the voluntary sacrifice of his dying Lord; and he remembers, that

> "There's not a sin that we commit,
> But cost his heart a groan."

and therefore he mourns for sin, because he mourns for Jesus Christ. This is the mark of real penitential sorrow, which is given by the prophet Zechariah, when describing the effect of the pouring out from on high, "the spirit of grace and supplication;" "They shall look on him whom they have pierced," (that is the way to look upon their sin, it pierced Christ;) "They shall look upon him whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him:" (that is the way to mourn for sin;) "they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son."* And this they cannot do of themselves, but because the Lord God will "pour his Spirit" upon them.

* Zech. xii. 10.

2. The sorrow peculiar to the spiritual seed, which is likewise the work of the Holy Spirit in them, is also a *seeking sorrow*. The position they hold in the present world, is that of comparative distance, and comparative absence from their Lord and Saviour; "Ye now therefore have sorrow; for because I go my way, sorrow hath filled your hearts. Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice."* So that when the whole of life, with all its exercises and trials of faith is taken into the account, none but the true believer can calculate the painful anxieties, the doubtings, and fearings, and earnest strivings of soul, and the strong cryings and tears, with which, from the beginning to the end of it, he has been seeking after Christ.

It is the will of our heavenly Father, who knows what is best for his children, that we should walk by faith, and not by sight; that we should seek for and find our Lord, not in a visible manifestation, but in a spiritual, invisible means. It is purposely appointed, as the touchstone of trial, to determine who will seek after God, and, by using the grace that is given them, feel after God, that they may find him, and continue to seek for him till life is done. It has always been the plan of Jehovah, in all his dealings with his people, to make a trial of their faith: and that, by a difficult and unlikely means. Abraham must believe, that to slay his son, will be life from the dead.† Naaman the Syrian, must wash in the wave of Jordan, and not in Abana and Pharpar, the mighty rivers of Damascus.‡ The children of Israel, bitten by living serpents, must look to a dead one and live.§ And so the believing people of every age and nation, must look at the body of Jesus, suffering for them on the cross, and by it approach to the Father, as the way, and the

* John xvi. 5, 6, 20. † Rom. iv. 17. Heb. xi. 19.
‡ 2 Kings, v. 12. § Num. xxi. 9.

truth, and the life. They must submit their proud and carnal understanding, and for the full revelation of the mystery, they must wait for the light of the world to come. And here the difficulty lies. Here is the difficulty, which is wisely and purposely contrived, to humble the pride of the natural heart, to bruise the spirit, by a gracious chastisement, into conscious helplessness and dependence, to subdue it to the state of a weaned child. Here is the mental trial, which has cost, in its exercise, to thousands of faithful, broken-hearted believers, days of anxiety, and nights of tears: even a seeking sorrow for the larger, the surer, the more sensible manifestation, of their absent, distant Lord. It is the sorrow with which Mary Magdalene stood at the sepulchre weeping, and stooped, and looked in: "they had taken away her Lord, and she knew not where they had laid him."* It is the sorrow of him that supplicated, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."† It is the sorrow of the Psalmist, when he said, "I am a stranger upon earth as all my fathers were: O hide not thou thy commandment from me, and hold not thy peace at my tears."‡ It is the sorrow of the ancient church in the Canticles, "By night on my bed, I sought Him whom my soul loveth; I sought him, but I found him not."§ Does a parent lament and mourn for the present loss of her departed child, although she knows it has entered to the heavenly rest, and that yet a little while and she shall join it there? Does the wife lament for her husband, or the friend for his friend? Then this is the sorrow with which believers are sorrowing, as long as they remain in the wilderness,—because while they are "at home in the body," they are "absent from the Lord." They see him not with their eyes. They find it difficult to realize him by faith. They are seeking for him in the Word, and in his ordinances, with a careful, and ear-

* John xx. 11—13. † Mark ix. 24. ‡ Psa. xxxix. 12. —cxix. 19.
§ Cant. iii. 1.

rest, and anxious mind. For the difficulties of their search, and the trials of their faith, they are in manifold heaviness; this alone is sufficient to keep them low before him: and so they are waiting till the day of triumph shall come, when, to "those that are waiting for him, he shall come in the clouds of heaven, and without sin unto salvation."*

3. And then, *thirdly*, the sorrow peculiar to believers is a *conflictive sorrow*. It comes from their conflict, their fierce and fiery conflict, with natural, in-dwelling sin. This was the sorrow of St. Paul, when he said, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And so, in like manner, it is the sorrow of all believers, that the "flesh is lusting against the Spirit, and they cannot do the things that they would." They long to be holy, as God, as Christ is holy, and as the destined inhabitants of a holy world. But sin dwelleth in them. Sin, which they hate, dwells in their mortal bodies, and sin, which they hate, they do. Their pride, and their selfishness, and their fleshly lusts, and their natural tempers, and their unbelief, are the Canaanites still in the land, and so they cannot be at rest. The Devil assaults them, and often frightens and alarms them. And a wicked and tempting world besets them on every side. And for all this they are sorrowful. Those two things are ever united, sin and sorrow. There must be sorrow wherever there is sin. They long to have done with it, to have gotten the victory, and to enter into rest.

These are the causes of sorrow, therefore, while they remain in this world, to all that are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For these they are broken in heart. For these they are of a contrite, that is, of a crushed and a bruised spirit: 1. *a penitent*

* Heb. ix. 28.

sense of their original and daily guilt before God, seen in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ: 2. *a careful and painful anxiety* in seeking after God, through Jesus Christ, in the means of his grace: 3. and an *incessant* and *perpetual conflict* with their own indwelling corruptions, in which they are partakers with Jesus Christ in his sufferings, striving against sin.

II. Now then, if they have these *peculiar sorrows*, let us secondly consider, what is also said of their *peculiar consolations*. "The Lord," says the text, "is nigh to them, and saveth them." Here is what he *is* to them; "he is nigh to them:" and here is what he *does* for them; "he saveth them:" "the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." In all those different sorrows and causes of tribulation, the Lord is nigh to them and saves them.

1. And *first*, beloved brethren, if it is yours to feel that sorrow for sin, that *penitential sorrow*;—then herein the Lord is nigh to you, and saveth you, in the way of *grace and forgiveness*. Not that your mourning for sin has any thing in itself to procure its pardon, to procure the favour of God. The deepest repentance has nothing to commend it to God. The truest repentance is still an act of sin. God is infinitely above it. Our sins cannot injure him; our righteousness cannot serve him, nor profit him; nor our repentance be of any cost in his sight. But he accepts it in Jesus Christ. For the sake of Jesus Christ, the broken and contrite heart he will not despise.

Look a little back at your past experience, at your private history. Is it a fact that you have, in secret, been bewailing the guilt of your sin? that you, like Ephraim, have been bemoaning yourself,

and smote upon your thigh? Have you, my brother, my sister, been grieving for the hardness of your heart? Have you been sad and sorrowful, while a thoughtless world has been gay and smiling around you? Have you thought of the sufferings of your dying Lord, and traced them to your transgressions, and mourned for your great ingratitude, and for your daily sins? Then receive the assurance, that here, in this very thing, is the work of grace upon your soul. Who is it has given you to feel this godly sorrow? It is the Lord that is nigh unto you. He has softened and melted the native hardness of your heart. He has removed and subdued the rebel character of nature, the proud, independent spirit, and is giving you the character of grace, the meekness and gentleness of Christ. He is making your soul as a weaned child. He is making you mourn that you may be comforted; smiting you that he may heal. He is making you poor in spirit, and "blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And as he is *nigh* to you, so he *saveth* you. The sins that you mourn for, even while you are mourning for them, are all forgiven by him, and blotted out by his precious blood. They are not to rise up against you. The grief that you have for them is a certain mark of their forgiveness: it brings you under that promise, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive them."

2. Then *secondly;* If, my brethren, you are conscious to have felt that *anxious sorrow* that we speak of, in *seeking* very earnestly, and with all your soul, after a personal knowledge of Christ, then here he is nigh to you, and saveth you, in the way of *comfort and manifestation.* True it is that you see him not: but, says he, "though it be expedient that I should depart, yet I will give vou another Comforter, and he

shall testify of me;" and I too "will manifest myself unto you as I do not unto the world."

Is there any one then among you, who has been of late perhaps earnestly seeking, and pleading, and striving, after this knowledge of Christ? Has many a solemn and sacred moment of time, as it passed along into eternity, seen you of late on your bended knee before God, crying to him for light and illumination, for a right understanding, and a living faith? Have you not merely thought very much upon the subject, but have you been praying with earnest, imploring prayer? Have you felt the difficulty of your way? and have you lifted up the voice with strong supplication, and tears, and sorrow of heart, that you might be permitted to attain to the satisfying knowledge of your invisible, absent Lord? Then, my friend, yours is this promise, "The Lord is nigh to you, and saveth you." Though you see him not, he sees and careth for you: though you think yourself far off from him, he is in reality nigh to you. Already you are safe in his holy keeping; the exercise may be be painful, but the end is sure; and perhaps very soon he will cause the cloud to remove; the mist of darkness will pass away; the time of discovery and manifestation will come; and the joy, and the peace of his manifested presence will be heaven begun below.

3. Thirdly and lastly: If you have felt and experienced that other state of sorrow which comes from the *conflict with sin;* then here the Lord is nigh to you, and saveth you, in the way of *help and assistance.* "My grace is sufficient for thee. As thy day is so shall thy strength be. Greater is he that is for you, than he that is against you." Already you have, like the church of Philadelphia, a "little strength:" and the Lord will not despise it. He will not "de-

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spise the day of small things." He "will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax," till the conflict, begun, continued, and ended in him, shall issue at last in songs of eternal victory.

A word, *in conclusion*, to *two* more descriptions of persons.

1. There are, in the first place those, and, it is to be feared, not very few in number, who make a great deal of *talk and outward profession of religion*, and of Gospel religion too, *who yet have none* of this chief ingredient of it, this broken, and bruised, and contrite spirit. Suffer us, brethren, simply to say to you then,—It is greatly to be feared that all this boasted attainment, all this rude and noisy declamation, is not the mind of Christ, nor the work of his Spirit upon you. Rather it is something of a fearfully different kind;—the strong delusion of the devil. You may speak of your revelations, your wonderful lights, your dreams and imaginations, your advances towards perfection;—but humbly, yet firmly, we tell you this from our Lord,—that you do not know yourselves:—that if you have not the broken spirit, you have not the Spirit of Christ, and that all your profession is iniquity, and Christ, as he is to you, is made the minister of deceit and sin.

2. And then, *finally*, a word to those more *worldly and carnal persons, who openly disclaim* that sorrowful, contrite spirit, as that which they neither experience nor yet desire to know. You think it weak and superstitious; an effeminate pusillanimity, degrading to the character and dignity of man. You are determined, in a proud and rebellious spirit, to brave it out with Jehovah, and instead of pleading for mercy, and bowing down before the cross of Jesus Christ,

to cast yourself upon his justice when you come to die!

My friends, just let us calculate, from what has been now stated, the position in which you stand. You are without these spiritual sorrows of the beloved people of God. And what is the consequence?

(1.) You have first no *penitent sorrow* for all the immense amount of a life of sin and carnal opposition to the God that gave you birth. And therefore, you have not betaken you for refuge to the only sacrifice that could take your sins away! What is the consequence? Not only that all that multitude of sin is with all its weight upon your head;—but this *one* sin you have added, greater and heavier than all the rest, and more certainly doomed to damnation, that you have rejected, or slighted, or neglected, the atoning sacrifice of God's beloved Son! The blood of Jesus Christ, in the judgment-day, will not speak better things for your forgiveness, but cry, like the blood of Abel, for a testimony against you. You have practically invoked it, like the Jews when they crucified him, "Let it be upon our heads."

(2.) You have not experienced that *careful and anxious sorrow*, in *seeking* the knowledge of Christ, while on earth;—and what complaint can you make, if then it is forbidden you to know him for all the ages of eternity? O what a scene will it be to such a soul, to behold at the last, when the veil is indeed removed, that same once suffering Redeemer, exalted on the throne of everlasting dominion, as the King of kings, and the Lord of lords!

(3.) And lastly, you have not been feeling that *sorrow* which comes to the children of God, because of their *warfare with sin*. You have not been toiling

on earth to be holy;—and then can you blame the sentence, already mercifully told you before the time, that "without holiness you cannot behold the Lord," but "he that is unjust let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still"?

My friends, it is the gracious office of the Holy Spirit of God, to give the broken and contrite heart. He "convinceth of sin." Jesus Christ is exalted, as a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to his people." None can give it to themselves. None ever did and no one ever will. It needs the Omnipotence that made the world.

Go home to-day, therefore, and beseech the Lord Jesus Christ, the sinner's Friend and Refuge, to give this gift to you. Be not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. Do not esteem it derogatory to the fancied dignity, and wisdom, and greatness of fallen man. The wisdom and learning of the world,—alas! what is it?—The veriest folly, and abomination with God! "Whether there be languages they shall cease; whether there be knowledge it shall vanish away." The wealth of the world,—what is it? "Moth and rust doth corrupt it, and thieves break through and steal!" The whole of this natural world,—what is it? Yet a little while, and "the earth with its works shall be burned up, the sun shall be turned into darkness, the moon into blood, and the stars shall fall from heaven." But the cross of Jesus Christ! Here is wisdom! Here is strength and durability! unsearchable riches for every seeking soul! It is Jehovah's touchstone of trial, to see who it is that will serve and belong to him. And it is at the same time the wisdom and power of God. God is glorified in it. Angels are looking unto it. All the saints that have lived and died upon the earth have by it entered into heaven. And millions of souls that are now in glory are sing-

ing its praises before the Saviour's throne. Brethren, let yours be the same inheritance. Share one hope with all the redeemed family. Let the free and offered grace of Jehovah join your names to their blessed number, and write them for all eternity, as saved sinners, in the Lamb's book of life.

SERMON XII.

TESTS OF TRUE RELIGION.

II. GOSPEL FAITH.

The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. Gal. ii. part of ver. 20.

A SECOND main principle of distinction is here afforded us, between the *life* of those who are spiritual and those who are carnal still. It is the principle of *Faith*. The carnally-minded lives and walks by sight, but the life of a spiritual person is a life of faith; a life lived by faith; "the life which I *now* live," that is, since my conversion to God, since I am crucified with Christ, the life which I now live, "I live *by faith*." And that too, a particular faith; "*by the* faith:"—not a mere general faith in eternal, invisible things, but "by the faith of *the Son of God*:" that is, having the Son of God as its object, that Christ is he, with whom I am now crucified; and having the Son of God, having Jesus Christ as the Author and the Finisher of it: and thus believing his love to me, and that, for my behalf, he has been made a sacrifice to God. This, when it is felt and enjoyed, as a matter of absolute verity, not of self-delusion or credulity, but of realized experience, is the "life in the flesh" of every spiritual person. And therefore this, besides that

characteristic of godly sorrow I have spoken of, is a *second* distinguishing feature, between the people of God and all the rest of mankind. The sinner having felt his sins, and having mourned for those sins with *godly sorrow, faith* apprehends the remedy and conducts him to it. So that if any one asks the question, What is there really found in the life of the people of God, which is not in the rest of the world? one answer to it is, that they live by faith. If any one asks, What do I need to make me a spiritual person, and to number me with the saints? one need is faith. Or if any one earnestly enquires, How may I know that I am already amongst that blessed number? then one answer to be given is, Examine and see if your life is a life of faith. We must answer the question by another, by the question of St. Paul; "Hast thou faith?" or by the question of the Saviour, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" It is the characteristic feature given by St. Paul of all the saints in every age, when reviewing their history from the beginning of the world, Abel, and Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and the saints in every age, that "by faith they obtained the promises, and wrought their righteousness, and lived and died in faith."

It is very plain then, that a more deeply important subject cannot occupy our thoughts than this great subject of faith; seeing that it is one of the chiefest marks of distinction, by which we may all know if we are spiritual and belong to God: for that if we are so, then our life now in the flesh is lived by the faith of the Son of God, as having loved us, and given himself for us. And as this is such a very important question for every person to decide, it must always be a profitable and deeply interesting exercise to examine what Holy Scripture has really said and revealed upon this subject of faith. In

order to have a comprehensive view of it, there are *four* points to be enquired into.

I. The *necessity* of faith.
II. The *nature* of faith.
III. The *source* of faith.
IV. And the *means* of faith.

This will be supposing a person addressing himself to the enquiry, who is as yet in entire and total ignorance concerning it. Such an one, before he will take much trouble to seek for faith, will naturally ask in the first place, What is the need of my having it? Being satisfied of this, then he will enquire, What is the thing that I am going in search of? Then he will enquire, Where am I to seek it from? and then he will enquire, How am I to set about it, What am I to do to obtain it? These four points I propose to speak to, and simply to expound to you the testimony of Scripture upon each of them: the necessity, the nature, the source, and the means of faith. Or, if you please, to make it more simple and plain to you, we will ask and answer these four questions,

Why is faith?
What is faith?
Where is faith?
How is faith?

I. We ask, in the *first* place, as the fundamental point of the enquiry, *Why* is faith? What is the *necessity* of having it? Is it needful, and to what extent is it needful, and why is it needful, that every one of us should have faith, and live our life in the flesh as a life of faith on the Son of God? Now, brethren, hear the statements of Scripture on this point. To prove its necessity, there are of course two points that we must prove; 1. that it is *absolutely*

needful, that is, that it cannot be dispensed with; 2. and that it is *universally* needful, that is, that it is needful to all and every person. Hear then the statements of Scripture.

1. First, it is *absolutely* needful. Here again we might divide into different heads; namely, that it is absolutely needful for profit, for character, for usefulness, for enjoyment, and for safety: but observe the general testimony of the record on these points.

It is needful for profit; "the word preached," we read, "does not profit, when it is not being mixed with faith in them that hear it." It is needful for character; for "without faith it is impossible to please God." It is needful to usefulness; "I believed, and therefore have I spoken:" "knowing the terrors of Lord, we persuade men:" and "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." It is needful to enjoyment; "he that doubteth is damned even if he eat:" "let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth, let him not think that he shall obtain any thing of the Lord." But also be sure of this, brethren, it is absolutely needful to present safety, and everlasting salvation: for it is plainly and clearly written, that "he that believeth not is condemned already:" "he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him:" "if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins:" and as if in still plainer language, that none might mistake it, "Go into all the world, and while he that believes shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned."*

2. And then, brethren, equally explicit is the word of Scripture, that faith is *universally* needful; that it is needful to us all, and therefore to each of us

* Heb. iv. 2. —xi. 6. 2 Cor. iv. 13. —v. 11. Rom. xiv. 23. James i. 6, 7. John iii. 18, 36. —viii. 24. Matt. xxviii. 19.

individually, to every separate person. "That they all might be damned," says St. Paul to the Thessalonians, "that they all might be damned, who believe not the Truth." And in his Epistle to the Hebrews, he shows "unbelief" to be an inevitable hindrance to any "entering into rest."* It is equally as positive as that he that believeth shall be saved, that he that beliveth not shall be damned.

Now then, here is our first point stated, the *necessity* of faith, or *Why* is faith? its *absolute, universal necessity*. Surely no one will dispute that without what the Bible calls faith, or believing, (what is meant by faith or believing is another point; we have yet to enquire into that;) but surely no one will dispute that without a something, which the Bible calls faith, no flesh can be saved. We must then subscribe to its necessity. We see that without it we cannot with profit hear one single sermon, or read one single line:—we cannot attain, in the least degree, to a holy nature, to a renewed character, so as to please God, but rather have made him a liar; for it is faith alone that "purifies the heart," and by which we are sanctified:"—we cannot be useful in life to the cause of our Lord in the world; for all we do is sin:—we cannot have inward comfort or real peace of mind in the smallest concerns of life, much less in religious and spiritual things; for "the wrath of God abideth on us;"—and we are out at sea for the final salvation of our souls at the great day; yea, rather, we are sealed with the mark of condemnation; and whenever the summons comes, and who shall say when it will come, we shall die in our sins, and then be damned.

II. But having established the necessity of all persons having faith, that is, at least, if they care for their present and future welfare; (if indeed there are

* 2 Thess. ii. 12. Heb. iii. 19.

any who do not think this of any moment;—if you do not care for it, whether God is pleased with you or not;—if you do not care to do any good in the world, before you die;—if you have no desire to answer the end for which God created you, by knowing and delighting in him, but are willing to live and die like the brutes;—if you do not consider it worth a thought, whether, when a few more seasons have come and gone, you join the company of the saints and behold the glory of Christ in heaven, or suffer the pains of eternal fire with the devil and his angels,—then to you we cannot prove the necessity of having faith in the Son of God:) but to all other persons having shown at least its necessity, or why is faith? the next enquiry which will naturally rise in the mind is as to the *nature* of it, or *What* is faith? Having seen the need there is to seek for it, then what is the thing we are to go in search of; *what* is faith?

To this question the Scripture gives a direct and positive answer. "Faith is the *substance* of things hoped for, the *evidence* of things not seen."* Now the things hoped for, the things not seen, are of course the glorious realities of the eternal world. We find ourselves here upon earth, to be under *two* limitations; a limitation of *extent;* for we are surrounded on every side by regions of space which our feet have never travelled, nor our eyes have seen beyond. We are enclosed and shut in, by the power that made us, to a fixed habitation, a created material world, which we know to be but a spot in the mighty universe around us. And we are, at the same time, under a limit of *duration;* even in this bounded and confined habitation we are only to live for a season, and then to die. We are therefore finite in capacity, and we are mortal in existence.

* Heb. xi. 1.

Now faith, founded on revelation, and supported by reason and conscience, discovers to the soul the two opposite principles to these. Instead of this finite, restricted habitation of earth, it discovers an infinite heaven, space without boundary, without end: and instead of this mortal, dying nature, it discovers the principle of immortality, the nature of eternity; a life that cannot die, but that liveth for ever and ever.

Faith receives and believes from Revelation, that is, on the word of Jehovah, that beyond the visible screen around us, by which we are covered and bounded in, there is an everlasting dwelling-place, a kingdom of glory which shall never end:* that it is, and that it has been for ever past, and will be for ever to come, without a beginning, and without an end, the dwelling-place of the Triune Jehovah:† that at some one period in the past eternity, whenever that period was, innumerable angels were created to dwell in that dwelling-place, to surround with their worship and service the throne of God and of the Lamb.‡ And faith receives and believes, however wonderful and overwhelming the discovery, that even the spirits and bodies of men, even mankind upon the earth, by an act of astonishing love and suffering on the part of the Son of God himself, have had that eternal dwelling-place made attainable to them: that the Son of God hath loved them and given himself for them, and that the kingdom of heaven, by that love and that gift, is opened to all believers.§ These are the things which are hoped for, the things which are not seen; but faith is their substance and their evidence.

1. It is the *substance* of all we *hope for*. What do we hope for in the heavenly world? We hope to

* 2 Cor. v. 1. † 1 Tim. vi. 16. ‡ Psa. lxviii. 17. Col. i. 15—17. Rev. vii. 11, 12. § John xiv. 2, 3.—xvii. 24. Phil. iii. 21.

see our God; to see our Lord and Saviour. We hope to be like him when we see him as he is. We hope to be holy, perfectly holy, and free from sin; for never a taint of sin, or that which defileth, has passed the boundary of that blessed world.* We hope to be filled with perfect love. We hope to enjoy the fruition of God himself; to live in the light of his countenance, and, without any feeling of uneasiness, or imperfection of service, to worship before his throne. And faith is the substance of all these things that we hope for. It is, by its power in the soul, their earnest and foretaste, yea their possession, their substance now. It is holiness now. It is the spirit of heaven now. It is love, and devotedness, and praise, and worship now. It is now the posession of God in Christ, making his abode in the heart. It is glory begun in the soul, and heaven begun below.

2. Faith is also the *evidence* of the things *not seen*. It assures and certifies the soul; it witnesses by absolute evidence, that those things are true. Let faith be in right and proper exercise, and it certifies the soul that possesses it, that the Word of God will be verified, and his promises be fulfilled. It certifies the soul by an inward, spiritual evidence, that now, at this moment, there is, without doubt or question, beyond the extent of the visible boundaries of space, that eternal weight of glory; that there is the Mighty God whose works we behold around us; that there is the risen and glorified Saviour who loved us and gave himself for us; and that there are the souls of his redeemed, that part of his Church which has already entered into rest, casting their crowns before him, and singing his praises before the throne. It certifies the soul of the present existence of these things, as much as if we saw them with our bodily eyes, or heard the songs of the redeemed; as much as

* Rev. xxi. 27.

that we see the natural sun in the heavens, or as if we could behold the Lord Jesus himself, as St. Stephen did, sitting at the right-hand of the Father, and looking down upon us. And it certifies the soul, that when a little more time has passed and the fulness of time is come, when the visible sun has been turned into darkness and the moon into blood, then that eternal kingdom shall be unveiled, and the Saviour, to those who are waiting for him, shall come in the clouds of heaven as King of kings and Lord of lords. And it assures the soul of its own individual, personal safety in him, if it is believing and trusting upon him, of its own individual security to obtain an entrance into life, and to be one of the inhabitants of that blessed world.

This is what faith is. And then as the result of all this and by the means of it, consider what it does. It "works by love."* It "purifies the heart." It "overcomes the world." The wandering soul returns by this faith to the God from whom it had separated. Believing the fact that he has come down from heaven to seek it, it rises to heaven to seek for him. It returns to him in Christ Jesus as a blessed child. It is drawn to the Father by a grateful love for the manner of love which he has bestowed upon it. It believes the promise of eternal life. It believes the reality of that holy and happy world, through the dying and rising of Jesus Christ. And living only for this end, to acquire a meetness for that inheritance as the inheritance of saints, it sits loose by the present world, and lives the life which it has in it by faith on the Son of God, who loved it, and gave himself for it.

My dear brethren, this is faith; what it is, and what it does for us. Is this your faith? Have you

* Gal. v. 6. Acts xv. 9. 1 John v. 4.

this heavenly principle, detaching your heart from the present dying world, and raising its affections to God, through the atoning sacrifice of Christ, as your Maker, your Father, your loving Benefactor, and your eternal home? And is that faith so in operation as to render it the study of your life to be getting ready for his kingdom, and to be holy as much as you may be now, that you may be holy as much as you can be then. Then this is faith; this is religion, true religion. This is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of the things not seen. And this will never be deceived, never be rejected, never disappointed, when you come to die. It is a happy principle to live by, and a safe dependency to die by. It may have its trials, and provings, its doubts and fears, but it will bring you peace at the last. It will save your soul. It will be now in this life a power of moral elevation, to restore you by degrees to the image of God; and then it will land you in his kingdom for ever, with all that have come by that faith through Christ to the Father, and washed their robes and made them white in his blood.

III. We have seen now the *necessity* of faith, or *why* is faith; and we have seen its *nature*, or *what* it is, and what it does for us. The next point of duty is a most important one indeed. It is, that we enquire for the *source* of faith, or *Where* is faith,—where are we to look for it?

Can a person give faith to himself? Can he work up his mind to it by natural analogies, or by rational expectations, or by reading the Christian evidence? Surely not. Why so? Because this would be a process in the head, but not a work in the heart; whereas faith lies in the heart, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness."* Can a person receive it from

* Rom. x. 10.

the arguments and teachings of others? Surely not. "Flesh and blood," saith the Lord, "revealeth it not:" the truly believing must be able to say with the Samaritans, "we believe, not for thy word, but because we have heard him ourselves."* Will then a quiet submission to the word of Revelation suffice, as a thing which we dare not arraign, because we cannot understand it? Still it must be said to you,—surely not;—because if this is faith, it is an idle and dead faith; it does not operate; it hides the talent in the earth.† It may, in some little degree, restrain by fear, but it does not work by love. Can then a person, by any thing that he can do, get faith from himself, or work it in himself, or give it to himself. Scripture, brethren, is express, that none of these things can any person, can any creature do. He can as easily make a world, or raise himself to life again after his body dies. The question is therefore, Where is he to find it? Where is a person to obtain and get faith? And the question is answered by replying to another: If a person cannot effect this faith in himself, how can he be guilty for not possessing it?

Now that he is guilty is clear;—for the Word of God says, that because of "not believing," the "wrath of God abideth upon the soul."‡ And it is clear that the not having faith is sin, because the express command of our Lord to all men is to have it; "Have faith in God:" "Believe also in me:" "Only believe."§ And in all the gifts of healing he gave according to their faith; "If thou canst believe." And all the profiting by the means of grace is according to the measure of faith. How then can a person be guilty for not having faith, and come short of advantages temporal and spiritual for not having faith, and be condemned at the last for not having faith,

* Matt. xvi. 17. John iv. 42. † James ii. 26. ‡ John iii. 36.
§ Mark xi. 22. —v. 36. John xiv. 1.

when, with all he can do, he cannot give faith to himself nor bring it to exist in his soul.

The answer is obvious. It is the answer also to the question, Where is faith to be found? And O what a cause of thanksgiving that Scripture on this is so express and clear! It is, that "faith is the gift of God." "Jesus Christ is the Author and the Finisher," that is, the first Beginner, and the Completer and Perfecter, "of faith."*

To make men guilty for not having faith, two things must be shown. *First*, that there is a *giver of it*. And *secondly*, that the gift which he gives of it, he *offers and promises to give to all*.

1. Now then, first, God is that *Giver*. Jesus Christ is that Giver. Let the seeking children of God receive a few passages of Scripture as an assurance of this: they are of precious value as ground for their souls to rest upon. In the 3rd Chapter of the Acts, and the 16th verse, it is called, the faith which is "*by him*." In the 14th Chapter of the Acts, and the 27th verse, it is said that "God has opened the door of faith to the Gentiles." That is a strong expression. A man without faith is, as it were, outside the spiritual building of God's Church; for faith is the door to it, and having no faith, the door is shut to him. But God has "opened the door." He has opened the door to the whole Gentile world, and now if they will they may enter in. No man could open the door, but God has opened it, and he that is willing may enter in. In the 12th Chapter of the Romans, and the 3rd verse, it is said, that God deals to every man, the "measure of faith." In the 12th Chapter of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, and the 9th verse, it is written, he "giveth faith by the Spi-

* Eph. ii. 8. Heb. xii. 2.

rit." In the 3rd Chapter of Galatians, and the 25th verse, it is said, that "faith is come," that is, as the distinguishing gift of the Gospel dispensation; and in the 5th Chapter and 22nd verse, that the "fruit of the Spirit is faith." In the 6th Chapter of the Ephesians, and the 23rd verse, the apostle asks for the Ephesians, "love with faith, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." In the 1st Epistle to Timothy, 1st Chapter and 14th verse, he says, that the "grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love." In the case of Simon Peter, the Saviour himself prayed for him that his "faith should not fail." And then we find that disciple, describing all believers, as "those who had obtained," or received, "like precious faith with himself."*

2. Here therefore, beloved brethren, is the Giver and the gift. But is it a gift *for all?* Is it a gift that all may plead for, and plead with assurance to obtain? Verily it is. O how precious, because how express is the assurance, that the gifts of the Gospel dispensation are gifts for all! "How much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts;" to whom? "to all that ask him." The "fruit of the Spirit is faith;" and to whom will he give the Spirit? "to all that ask him." "Every good gift cometh down from the Father of Lights;" but to whom will he give them? He "giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." He has "opened the door of faith to all the Gentiles." He has, it is said in the 17th Chapter of the Acts, and the 31st verse, "offered faith unto all men:" and speaking of that by the prophet, and of all the blessings of the Gospel dispensation, as a feast of fat things, of wine and milk, he says to all, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, and he that hath no money, come without money and price and buy them." "Whosoever will," says the Saviour, to close, as it

* Luke xxii. 32. 2 Pet. i. 1.

were, the Blessed Volume with one express and universal assurance, "whosoever will let him come, and take of the water of life, and take it freely." "The Spirit and the Church say, Come, and whosoever is athirst, whosoever will, let him come."*

And therefore, beloved brethren, while we encourage you to come and to seek for faith, and that, most affectionately wishing that you may seek and may obtain it, we also declare it to be guilt upon you if you obtain it not. To be without perfect faith, without faith in its full assurance, is so far a measure of guilt and sin, because God is not unwilling to bestow it, but because we neglect it and therefore have it not. To have little faith is still greater sin, but still, with the smallest portion, the sin is pardoned and the soul is saved. But to have no faith, when Christ has died to obtain it, and God has offered to bestow it,—to be destitute of all faith, is sin that will ruin and destroy the soul.

IV. I must now just mention our *fourth* particular; the *means* of faith, or *How* is faith? Having seen that it is a gift, of which God is the Giver, and a gift for all, then the only remaining point is the means of seeking it. Briefly these are *three*:

1. First, the *means of prayer.* For this we have the example of all the disciples; "Lord, increase our faith."† A true believer will pray for it every day. "I have prayed for faith," said a godly minister now living, writing to his father, a bishop in a neighbouring kingdom, "I have prayed for faith, till the blood has burst forth from my nostrils."

2. Secondly, the *means of the Word:* "Faith

* See Matt. vii. 11. Gal. v. 22. Luke xi. 13. James i. 17, 5. Isa. lv. 1. Rev. xxii. 17. † Luke xvii. 5.

cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Therein "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith."* And all that have any experience of heavenly things have found this true. It is in the studying of that living Word that difficulties die, and light is sown for the righteous, and gladness and confidence for the true in heart.

3. And thirdly, *the means of duty:* "If any will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."† A man that lives in transgression will never have faith, or believe the truth of Revelation. It is the beam in the eye, that hides the view of Jehovah. Faith is the fruit of the Spirit, and he that grieves the Spirit, and quenches the Spirit, exchanges confidence for darkness, and faith for habitual unbelieving. Those, says St. Paul, who "put away a good conscience;" those "make shipwreck of faith."‡ For though "with the perfect the Lord will be perfect, with the froward he will show himself froward."§

My dear brethren, the very name of Christ's Church, of which we are members, is "the household of faith."‖ May many that are now unbelievers be added to it from amongst us by that gift of God, and may the Lord increase the faith of us all by the work of his Spirit, till, like that of the Thessalonians, our faith "groweth exceedingly;" till we "all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ!"¶

* Rom. x. 17.—i. 17. † John vii. 17. ‡ 1 Tim. i. 19. § Psa. xviii. 26.
‖ Gal. vi. 10. ¶ 2 Thess. i. 3. Eph. iv. 13.

SERMON XIII.

TESTS OF TRUE RELIGION.

III. DIVINE LOVE.

The love of Christ constraineth us. 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

THE state of heart which is here described as the state of a Christian believer, the fruit of the other two which have been discussed, is the third great test of true religion which I propose to specify. It is calculated to lead us to several particulars of profitable consideration. It opens up at once, in the mind of every sincere seeker after God, a wide field of self-examination: to some it is the ground of much reproof, and to others of some encouragement. In order to calculate and apply the character which the text describes to us, we must endeavour to look at it in *six* points of view;

I. As a *close test of religious principle;*
II. As a *total exclusion to false confidence;*
III. As a *vital point for personal enquiry;*
IV. As a *question calling for some allowances;*
V. As a *state of attainment liable to great preventions;*
VI. As an *object of endeavour admitting of great and gracious helps.*

I. Consider it first as a *close test of religious principle.* It is the plain testimony of Scripture, that such an experience as the text describes, this love of Christ constraining us, is the only substance and life of religion in the soul of man. What love of Christ the apostle spoke of, is plain from the rest of the verse, and what he meant by its constraining us, is plain from the verse that follows it. The *love* which he spoke of was this,—that whereas "all were dead, Christ died for all." And the *constraining* was this,—the cool, deliberate judgment of the mind, ("because we thus judge,") "that he died for all, that they which live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who died for them and rose again." The love of Christ to believers, applied to them by the Holy Ghost, produces in believers love to Christ; and then that love constrains them to live to him; their life is a service of love to their Lord and Saviour; whatever he has spoken, they remember; whatever he has revealed of the Father, of heaven, of eternity, of the things to come, is the theme of their meditation; whatever he did, is their pattern; whatever he has commanded they practise, both as to how they are to live towards God, and how they are to live with each other; what he has forbidden they forsake; what he has promised they plead for and obtain,—they search out all those "great and precious promises," and daily look up to the throne of his glory, to have those promises fulfilled.

This, and nothing short of this, is true religion. It is an action, a strong inward action, of the principle of love, love to the Saviour in the soul of man. It is a working of love, grounded on two things, the two dispositions described in the two preceding sermons; viz. on a conscious experience of the need of such a Saviour to pardon and subdue sin; and on a believing faith, which is the gift of God, that Christ has

so loved us, and given himself for us. Without this, all endeavour in religion is labour and sorrow, and is disappointing and unsuccessful. True love to the Redeemer, the love of God in Christ in the heart, makes duty easy, religious exercises pleasant and delightful, and all the service of God to be perfect freedom. And this, I say, the Bible does very plainly declare to be the very being and life of that gracious change, which the Holy Spirit produces, by the Gospel, in all the children of God: "I drew them with bands of love:" "Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love:" "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, whatever else be his character, let him be Anathema Maranatha:" "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." And so it is said to those who have "left their first love," "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, or else I will come to thee quickly."* Indeed, what is religion but the love of God, implanted again in the heart of his fallen creature; man coming back to that proper state, that holy state of Creator and creature love, from which he fell by transgression to love his own self, to love iniquity and a sinful world? What is holiness but the love of a holy God, and so delighting to do his will? What is the enjoyment of religion here, but a personal experience of that assurance, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee?" And what will heaven itself be, but "love perfected," the perfect exercise of love? The song of the redeemed in glory is a song of love, "Unto him that hath loved us, and given himself for us."

My dear brethren, it is very important to have a clear and a simple view of this;—that nothing but the conscious experience of the love of Christ constraining

* Hos. xi. 4. Gal. v. 6. 1 Cor. xvi. 22. 1 John iv. 16. Rev. ii. 4.

us, is a true test of religious principle. When we come to look into our own hearts, that we may know what spirit we are of, it is of infinite moment, to come close to the point in this matter. Let this be the principal enquiry;—not so much, What sins have I abstained from? What secret duties have I observed or neglected? What have I been hearing, or reading, or praying, or performing? These things are well in their place; but rather let it be the enquiry, Where do they all proceed from? Why have I cared for these things, and thought and laboured so much about them? Are they because of the love of Christ constraining me? Do they spring from that love as the principle? Have I the love of my Lord and Saviour, implanted and fixed in my heart? Is there really that love of Christ abiding in me, which is the work of the Holy Ghost, as the result of my discovery of my need of a Redeemer, and then the result of the firm belief, and understanding, and cordial receiving, that Christ has become that Redeemer, and has died for all men, when all were dead? Nothing short of the conviction that this is indeed the case will ever give real peace to an upright, seeking soul.

II. For observe, brethren, *secondly:* that the statement made in the text, of this particular experience of believers, viz. that the "love of Christ constraineth them," is at once a doing away with every other dependence, a *total exclusion to every false confidence.* I mean that if a man cannot feel this state of experience, if he cannot truly take up these words and say, "The love of Christ constraineth me," then whatever else be his experience, whatever be his character, however sincere his endeavours, however strict his life and conversation, he has no real ground of assurance or pledge of safety.

There are many false dependences. There is a

legal dependence;—the man who trusts in his own works and uprightness, and throws himself upon God's justice. God forbid we should any of us be so bold as to stand upon such a ground-work in the great day! There is a *partial* dependence;—those who purpose to do their best, to make sincere endeavours both to know and do the Divine will, and, relying much on their own sincerity, look for the rest to God. There is a *careless* dependence;—that of the sinner that slumbers on in sin, and wears his life away in it, hoping that some how or other, he knows not how, all will be well at last: he shall do as well as other men do, and rather than have such mental anxiety, and keep such strictness of life, he will take his chance for it. There is a *doctrinal* dependence;—persons that have been instructed in the features of Gospel truth, and are looking to Christ as a Saviour; but still, at the same time, only knowing the truth in the head, not enjoying its power and experience in the heart: as if Christ were to prove a Saviour to them, merely because they know of him by the outward ear, without either loving or obeying him. With part of these last, it is an *Antimonian* dependence;—a relying for safety, while actually living in sin; and even with the rest of them, it is a *formal* dependence:—a trusting to knowledge instead of grace, to light instead of conversion. And then still one step higher in the scale of self-deception, there is an *experimental* dependence;—I, says such an one, have felt it as well as known it,—I have had my frames and feelings,—I am often very uneasy and conscience-smitten,—I remember such a time when I heard this, and such a time when I felt that, and such a time when so and so, and I saw a light, and a word came to me, and I felt lightened, and we know not what besides.—There may be something *sometimes* in this, brethren; once, perhaps in a thousand cases; but speaking for the most part, it is gross delusion.

Now to trust to any of these things, where the love of Christ constraining is not the basis, is a false confidence. It is a refuge of lies. It is to lean on a broken reed; to stand on a sandy foundation, amidst the storm and tempest of a coming judgment. It is to build a superstructure of hay, and straw, and stubble, as fuel for the fire of the judgment-day. Even the best of these things,—suppose, we will say, an earnest, conscientious desire to do the will of God, and to please him, and to have a right knowledge of his revelation,—even a continual self-exercise to give up the world, and abstain from its lust and pleasures for the sake of the kingdom of heaven,—yet what is all this, if it is not a service of love, if it does not proceed from the love of Christ in the heart? If there is not there, in the heart, the real Christian motive, what can be the possible use of an outward resemblance to the Christian character? Surely it is cleansing the streams, when the fountain is bitter from which they flow! Surely it is pruning the branches, while the root of the tree is corrupt and bad! It is healing a wound that is still uncured! It is putting a fair and a lovely mask upon a radical deformity! It is whitening the face of a sepulchre, full of corruption and dead men's bones!*

None of these sorts of dependence, believe it, brethren, will stand for one single moment in the judgment-day. Nothing but the love of Christ in the heart will then make for the sinner. Love is the mind of Christ himself, the image of Christ, imprinted on the souls of his believers, that "as he is, so they may be in this world." And therefore it is said of it, "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world."† When the Saviour does return in the clouds of heaven to judge the world, there will

* James iii. 11. Matt. vii. 17, 18. —xxiii. 27. † 1 John iv. 17.

be a people found waiting for him, elected and gathered from every generation and nation, and there will be a mark by which they will be known; and that mark will be the mark of our text,—his love constraining them to a holy, saintly life;—the mark which he gave of his people to the ancient Jews, "If God were your Father ye would love me."* All the doings of men, the works, the righteousness of all mankind must in that day be as filthy rags: but those who have loved the Saviour, those who have believed that he came out from God, those who have washed their robes and made them white in his blood, and have lived their life unto him, dwelling in love, and walking with him in white, and, now that he is gone from this world, are waiting for his glorious appearing;—those who are found in this state, whenever he comes to judgment, will surely receive that welcome, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

When David, the type of the Lord, was banished from Jerusalem, in the time of his humiliation, and went up, weeping, up the Mount of Olives, there were some that exulted against him,—Absalom that raised the rebellion,—Ahithophel that gave his counsel, and Shimei, that cursed him; but there were others that were true and faithful to his cause,—Ittai the Gittite, that would not leave him, Barzillai and Shobi that ministered unto him, and many in Israel that waited for him, and spoke at last to "bring back the king." And while these were promoted to honour, the others were visited with disgrace and death. And so will it be, and so it is, with the spiritual David, with the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, in this world, it is the time of his humiliation, the dispensation of the cross; the time of his banishment also, by the usurpation of evil spirits and evil men, from his own created world. He

* John viii. 42.

also in the garden of Olivet was exceeding sorrowful, and cried with strong crying and tears. But while an ungodly world despises his holy name, and mocks at his just authority, his faithful disciples are ministering unto him; they are waiting for his return to them; they, at the end of the world, will at last be assembled to bring back the king. And while they are greatly exalted, brought to sit down with Jesus Christ in his throne, crowned with crowns of gold, and robed with white robes of glory, as kings and priests unto God and the Father for ever, the Lord will say of the others, "These mine enemies that would not that I should reign over them, bring them here, and slay them before me."

III. Now then let this lead us, in the *third* place, to look at the character specified in the text, as a *vital point for personal enquiry*. Do we, brethren, personally, individually, feel this love of Christ, this love of a risen Saviour, as a constraining principle within us? Let us not shirk the enquiry, nor postpone it, nor pass it by; but put it close and apply it and search it thoroughly. Have *we* so felt our need of Christ as a Saviour, have we so believed and received that he is that Saviour, that now, by the work of the Holy Ghost within us, the love of Christ is shed abroad in our hearts?

1. My dear brethren, let me say to you, in the *first* place, that, beyond all question, there are some *certain marks*, infallible marks, that a man has *not* the love of Christ in him? Is the work of the Lord and Saviour, the great transaction of redeeming love, a matter that seldom enters into your serious thoughts? you can think of your worldly business, your gains, and your losses; you can think of your families and carnal interests, but you feel no real concernment that Christ has died. Is the prospect of glory at last,

when life is ended,—to be with the Lord in heaven (that prospect which bears up the spirit of every true believer,) a consolation to which you are a stranger? you can anxiously care for your future prospects in life, but not for the life hereafter. Do you live in habitual ignorance, or else in open transgression, of the laws and commandments of Christ, which he has given his people as their rule of life? Do you break the Sabbath, forsake the house where the Saviour meets his people, or, if you attend it, do not listen to his word, and so live in an infidel, negligent, careless manner? Do you never hold any real communion with Christ, but are always sensual and earthly in the spirit of your mind? Then surely we need not tell you, what all this plainly indicates, that to you it is nothing that God has loved, or that Christ has redeemed the world. You would be just the same as you are, if it had never happened.

2. Again it must be said to you, that there are other states of experience *which many persons trust to*, as marks of this love dwelling in them, which yet are *no certain proofs* of it. Great anxiety about the soul,—a feeling conscience, a susceptible spirit, and a hearing ear,—self-examination, and self-discipline,—the diligent use of the means of grace,—these are no certain proofs of a state of love. They may be the fruit of fear, or else of superstition, or else of a natural seriousness, or else of the counsel of others, or else of the example of others. And if this be the case, you will find this particular sign of it,—that all those duties are hard and difficult to do; that the Bible is mostly a sealed book, and not a living and enlightening word; that prayer is a matter of constraint and duty, and not a privilege and divine enjoyment.

3. But, Christian brethren, there are also *positive*

marks of that state of mind, when a soul, through the grace of God, *does love* the Saviour. What are those marks? "His name is as ointment poured forth:" "how sweet the name of Jesus sounds, in the believer's ear!" His sayings and commandments are kept as a precious store, "dearer than thousands of gold or silver:" the believer can say of them, "O, how I love thy law!" To hold communion with him is a most delightful exercise; there is at those seasons a powerful manifestation of his gracious presence. A state of constant watchfulness all the day is keeping the soul, from a desire to please God. The motive of humble thankfulness is in habitual operation; it leads to every duty, and supports under all temptations. The conflict with indwelling sin is attended with frequent victory, so that besetments are conquered, and Christ is found by the soul to be all-sufficient, and "able to keep it from falling." In short, both in the feeling of the heart, and in the evidence of the life, such an one lives in the spirit of adoption, as one brought nigh by Christ to the Father as a blessed child. He knows that God has accepted him, that all his sins are forgiven him, and the prospect is always before his thoughts, and fixed in his affections, that yet a little while, and he shall have done with this present sinful world, and be for ever with his Lord and Saviour, and with all his redeemed in heaven, and with God the Father of all.

IV. These are some tests of love. But still, after all, it must be admitted, that to know very certainly whether we love the Lord Jesus Christ, whether the "love of Christ constraineth us," is not in all cases an easy matter. I have therefore to show, in the *fourth* place, that it is a *question of experience calling for large allowances.* I may mention some of these allowances.

1. In the *first* place, the exercise of love in the

heart towards Christ is a *gradual* exercise. It is not a disposition of mind, or a point of experience which attains to maturity all at once. It may have a small and a faint beginning, as well as a height, and depth, and length, and breadth. "I bow my knees to the Father," says St. Paul, that ye may be "rooted and grounded in love:"* so that thus it is like a tree which at first perhaps but a slender scion, gradually deepens and strengthens its roots, in order to spread its branches and to grow its fruits; or it is like the foundation to a building, on which the structure has yet to be builded. Then being rooted and grounded in love, ye shall be able to comprehend it, in its "height, and depth, and length, and breadth." As it is said, "In thy light we shall see light," so we may say, In thy love we shall see love. We read of a "loving little," and of a "loving much;" of a "love to increase," and a "love to be perfected," and a "love to abound yet more and more."† There are large additions to be made to it in us all, even before we attain to the state of heaven, the state of "perfect love." Let not therefore the feeble Christian despise in himself what the Lord will not despise, the "day of small things."

2. *Secondly*; love in the heart is a *jealous* exercise. It is one very general mark of a true believer, that he is so much in earnest to love God, to love Christ, that he can hardly think that he loves him as yet at all. And "jealousy," or doubting of love, is "cruel as the grave."‡ In the midst of desire for further attainment, he counts not himself to have attained. He forgets the things that are behind, in pressing to the mark of the prize before him.§ It is right to be seeking for more and more, but let us be thankful for what we already have, if it be but a little strength.

* Eph. iii. 17. † Luke vii. 47. 1 Thess. iii. 12. 1 John iv. 17. Phil. i. 9. ‡ Cant. viii. 6. § Phil. iii. 13.

3. *Thirdly;* the love of Christ in the heart, is a *contested* exercise; there are rivals to such an affection. The things of this present world, and even the lawful, permitted use of the creature, divide the heart, and often to a painful degree, distract the desires and affections.

4. *Fourthly,* while present things and earthly ties and allurements are objects of sight, the love of Christ in the heart is a *distant* and *spiritual* exercise. The believer believes, but he has not seen. A man, it is true, can love an earthly benefactor for the benefits done to him, though he has never seen him; but not with that identity of interest and affection which he would do if he had seen his face in the flesh. And Christ the believer has never seen, God he has never seen: heaven, and eternity, and the blessed realities of that future world, have never been opened to his view. And it is hard to the nature of man, as a material and sensible creature, unavoidably walking amongst the things that are seen and temporal, still nevertheless not to walk by sight of those things, but rather by faith of the things unseen and eternal; to set not affections on the things of the earth, but, by the love of Christ constraining him, to raise those affections to the things above, because Christ there sitteth at the right hand of God.

5. *Fifthly;* the love of God in every believer, is a *protracted* exercise; it is a lengthened course of probation, an exercise of faith for the whole of life, and an exercise of "patience, having her perfect work."* The work of redeeming love from which it originates is a matter of long retrospection in ages past; and the fruit that is to come of it to every faithful soul is a long prospective blessedness in eternity to come.

* James i. 4.

6. *Sixthly;* this love is likewise, after all, at the best of its state upon earth, only an *imperfect* exercise. Man is a fallen being, and after all his attainments, even by the work of Divine grace in his redemption and sanctification, still he is very defective, a most unprofitable servant. Still he is "subject to vanity." The best of his attainment, while he stays upon earth, is just to be waiting "in hope to be delivered at last from the bondage of sin and death, into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Then the prayer of the Lord and Saviour will be completed, even in the weakest and meanest of his saints, "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me, may be in them and I in them."*

V. And then to come to our fifth particular, we have to consider, that this love of the soul to the Saviour is a *state of attainment liable to great interruptions.* A man by one single step may retrograde more in an hour than he has attained in a course of years. There is a "losing the first love." There is a love that we read of, that "through the abounding of iniquity, the love of many shall wax cold." There is a declining to a Laodicean spirit, "neither cold nor hot."†

My dear brethren, the way to increase in love, to grow in the love of Christ, is to keep what we have already; not to go backward and lose the labour of years, and have it all to do over again. "A penny saved is a penny got." Beware of these causes, therefore, which lead to a state of declension in this grace of love. Beware of committing sin: it will grieve the Holy Spirit, and quench the flame of his love within you: "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love."‡ Beware of neg-

* John xvii. 26. † Matt. xxiv. 12. Rev. iii. 15. ‡ John xv. 10.

lecting the means of grace, especially private prayer. Beware of engaging too deeply in worldly cares, but rather "set light" by the world, as that of which the fashion is passing away.

VI. For *lastly*, we have to observe, that the state of love which we speak of, as the love of the sanctified soul to Christ, is an *object of pursuit and endeavour, attended by gracious and great assistances.* They are partly in the goodness of God the giver, and partly in the diligence of man the seeker.

1. My dear brethren, often we need to be reminded, that God is a liberal and a cheerful giver, "giving to all men liberally and upbraiding not." The "fruit of his Spirit is love." "The love of Christ," says the Scripture, is "shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." And "if ye being evil can give good gifts to your children, how much more to the children of glory their Father which is in heaven!"*

2. But then you must also notice, to whom will he give his Spirit? to those that ask him. It is to this that we always bring it: again and again it comes to this, "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find." There are two great means to obtain from a gracious God, and a grace-giving Saviour, this gift of holy love:—*contemplation* and *prayer*. Man is to meditate on the love of Christ; that is one principal means. And man is to pray to have that love in his heart. Then God is the God that observes the thoughtful spirit, and hears and answers prayer.

Beloved, what is the value of the gift which we set before you? If a man have it not, he is "Anathema Maranatha," *accursed till the coming of our*

* Gal. v. 22. James i. 5. Rom. v. 5. Luke xi. 13.

Lord. But if a man would desire to have it, hear what the wisest of men has said of it; "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned." Hear what he says of its strong and ardent exercise; "The coals thereof are as coals of fire, which are as the fire of the Lord." Hear what he says of its perpetuity; "Love is as strong as death, many waters cannot quench such a fire, neither the floods can drown it." And offer the prayer which he offered, which the Church rather offered in him, to the Lord Jesus Christ; "Set me as a seal upon thine heart and a seal upon thine arm."*

Believe it, in simplicity and humble reliance, that while you cannot, in the smallest respect, supply this grace to yourself, or work this feeling within you, yet if you ask you shall receive. Put the Lord to the proof of it, in self-renunciation, and in simple faith. And this is the way marked out, to obtain this precious gift, the way in which it is promised; "The *Lord direct* your hearts into the love of God." "The *grace of our Lord* is exceeding abundant with faith and love." "Ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, *praying in the Holy Ghost,* keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."†

* Cant. viii. 6, 7. † 2 Thess. iii. v. 1 Tim. i. 13. Jude 20, 21.

SERMON XIV.

TESTS OF TRUE RELIGION.

IV. PERSONAL HOLINESS.

The law of his God is in his heart. Psalm xxxvii. part of 31st verse.

THIS is the scriptural account, brethren, of the proper state of a true believer. It is the main point of distinction, as far as it regards the *life* and *character*, between those who are born again, and those who are unconverted: so that if the question be asked, as it frequently is, What is there really found in the *character* of the people of God, which is not found, nor can be, in those that are not regenerate, but which makes them a peculiar people, no longer "even as others," nor as they once were?—the principle specified in the text suggests the reply to it. The other parts of the Psalm describe that people by various names;—the "upright," the "righteous," the "perfect," the "saints," the "just," the "good," the "meek," the "merciful," the "poor and needy," and those that "wait upon the Lord;"* and then the text pronounces it, as a fact and reality, of every one of that people, that "the law of his God is in his heart:" that is, "*God*" is the great and glorious object to whom all his concerns have reference; God is "*his* God;" the "*law* of God" is the habitual rule of life to him; and that law is

* Ver. 9, 11, 12, 14, 18, 23, 25, 26, 28, 37.

"*in his heart:*" it is written there, as on a tablet, by the finger of Deity, and it reigns there in all his affections, as that which he consents to as holy, and just, and good. It is the mark of the spiritual seed, which the Lord has given by his prophet Isaiah; "the people in whose heart is my law;"—it was the mark, prophetically "written in the volume of the book," of Him whom they follow and imitate; "I delight to do thy will O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart."*

Moreover, as this is the essential character of all the saints, wherein they differ from an ungodly world, so it is attained to by certain peculiar principles, certain motives to endeavour, which are in the saints, but which are not in other men. It is a great work, a most difficult, arduous work to be done in any person, to bring such an earthly, fleshly nature as the sinful, carnal mind, to a state of spiritual life, of personal holiness, and real delight in God. If you would lift and move some ponderous mass of matter, a piece of timber, or a block of stone, you must bring a proportionate force to act upon it. If you would have some heavily-laden vessel to make its way, it will not be sufficient just to set it on the water, but you must spread its sails to the wind. Just so it is with the heart of man, with respect to the law of God. The "law is spiritual, but he is carnal, sold under sin."† His heart is a "heart of stone." It is a deal too heavy with earthly incumbrances to rise to the realization of heavenly things; it is slow to believe, and dull to comprehend them, and backward to turn from iniquity, and "dead in trespasses and sins."‡ It needs a force, and a principle, a lever of moral power, to lift it above the world. It needs like the vessel, the breath of the Spirit of the Lord to "swell its sails, and to speed its way." And this power, this moving influ-

* Isa. li. 7. Ps. xl. 8. † Rom. vii. 14. ‡ Eph. ii. 1.

ence, it may safely be asserted, does not exist at all, nor any thing like it, in any natural man; no man has it but the believer in Jesus; all other attempts after holiness and legal obedience will prove useless, and end in vanity; the power is only to be found in the grace and the motives of Christianity. But there are, in the believer in Jesus, in order to bring him to this state, "the law of his God in his heart," *three* great principles at work, peculiar principles, that is, which carnal men neither know nor feel. Those principles, beloved, are the three which have been considered in the three preceding discourses. Herein is the whole of religion: it is the realization of the character described in the text, and that moreover attained to by the gracious exercise of those peculiar principles.

(1.) There is, first, the *principle of godly sorrow.* A Christian is one that has seen and felt his sins. He has seen their guilt and malignity in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ bearing them in his own body on the tree, and dying the Just for the unjust to bring him to God; and he would not, he cannot desire to "crucify that Saviour afresh," to "wound him in the house of his friends," to "put his finger into the print of the nails, or to thrust his hand into his side," by his disobedience, his unfaithfulness, his carnal indulgences, or his unbelief. "Behold, this self-same thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort; what carefulness it wrought in you; yea, what clearing of yourselves; yea, what indignation; yea, what fear; yea, what vehement desire; yea, what zeal; yea, what revenge."*

(2.) Then secondly, the believer has in exercise, the *principle of faith,* which the worldly-minded has

* 2 Cor. vii. 11.

not; and "faith purifies the heart, and faith overcomes the world."* By believing the "great and precious promises," it lays hold of the power which is in Christ, which is by the resurrection of Christ, and the gift of his Spirit, to enable him that believes them to "escape the pollution that is in the world through lust.†" "Who is he that overcometh, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" To what is all that catalogue of subsequent attainments which St. Peter gives us,‡ "virtue, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and godliness, and brotherly kindness, and charity,"—to what are all these to be added as the prior-existing principle, and so "to abound," except to "faith?" Faith also realizes the future world, the reward of eternal life, and eternal happiness and glory, which awaits the believer, the rest that remaineth for the people of God. And this encourages the soul; it strengthens the determination; it satisfies the heart for its surrender of carnal indulgences and the present pleasures of sin; it keeps up the pilgrim-spirit, by keeping the final crown of righteousness, the end of faith in the soul's salvation before the view.

(3.) Thirdly; the believer in Jesus is enabled to bring to the struggle against the power of sin, and for the attainment of holiness, and the law of God in his heart, he is enabled to bring to that struggle, what the world is also a stranger to, the *holy principle of love;* the strongest of all motives, even in natural things, but peculiarly so in religion; nothing so strong to conquer sin by, nothing so able to maintain the pursuit, and achieve the attainment of holiness, as the constraining influence of redeeming love: "If ye love me, keep my commandments:" "The love of Christ constraineth us, because we judge, that when we were all dead, he died for all, that we which live

* Acts xv. 9. 1 John v. 4. † 2 Pet. i. 4. ‡ Ib. Ver. 5, 6, 7.

should not henceforth live unto ourselves, but to him which died for us and rose again."*

These, I say are principles which are in force in the believer, but which are not in other men; these are the means, the machinery of his sanctification, the wheels within the wheels, the means and motives by which the Holy Ghost is working in him, to make him a new creature, to keep him in newness of life, to increase him in true holiness, and gradually to fit him for a perfect and holy world.

I shall now consider the text more directly and more immediately as the subject of this discourse: "the law of his God is in his heart." And in a simple dependence on the teaching and influence of the Holy Spirit, I shall endeavour three things;

I. To *establish some statements respecting it;*
II. To *derive some deductions from it;*
III. And to *offer some arguments for it.*

I. I have *first* to *advance and prove some statements* respecting it; that is, as to what is the reality of the character which the text describes,—"the law of his God is in his heart:" and for a man to be in such a state as is here represented, I shall proceed to show that *four* things are clearly necessary.

1. First, there is necessary, a *submissive creature-obedience to Creator-government:* it is the "*law*" of his God which is in his heart. Such an one is brought back, by Divine grace, into the same kind of humble, and obedient, and dutiful relation to God as that in which Adam was before he fell. The spirit of fallen nature is independency of God, dislike to his moral government, wilful departure from the yoke of his just

* John xiv. 15. 2 Cor v. 14, 15.

authority: grace in the heart gradually restores a man to his proper creature-position, and makes him desire above all things to be under the merciful dominion and supreme direction of Jehovah; to be "not without law to God, but under the law to Christ."* And notwithstanding that there still remains in the believer a continued opposition of the "law of sin in the members" to this "law of God in the mind," the "flesh lusting against the spirit, so that he cannot do the things that he would," yet he does make progress in subduing its evil leaven, and as he goes on his way towards that heavenly inheritance where he shall love and serve God perfectly and no more be harassed by any defilement or imperfection, he is able to say with St. Paul over many and many a victory, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."†

There is no earthly relation by which we can form an estimate of the proper nature or the peculiar blessedness of that position with respect to God, in which the intelligent creature was before he fell, and to which it is the purpose of grace to bring him back. The nearest affinities of earth are all made use of in combination to convey to us some idea of it. The rule of a gracious sovereign over his subjects; "just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints;"‡—the care of a benevolent master over his faithful servants; "behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, so wait our eyes upon the Lord our God;"§—the tender controul of a parent over his children; "to those that receive" the Saviour "to them he gives power to become the children of God;"‖—these are but faint comparisons, to represent to us the care of our heavenly Father over those who are made his people by adoption, through faith in Jesus Christ. Whereas, on the contrary, even the brute creation,

* 1 Cor. ix. 21. † Rom. vii. 23, 25. ‡ Rev. xv. 3. Psa. cxxiii. 2.
‖ John i. 12.

and even inanimate nature are made to shame the ingratitude and the disobedience of those who reject the Divine authority and do not serve God nor obey his law: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib;—ye hear, O heavens, and ye give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken, but Israel doth not know, my people do not consider; I have nourished and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me."* The nearest estimate we are able to form of the proper state and the divine enjoyments of submissive creature-obedience to Creator-government, to which the souls of the faithful are called, begun and maturing in them here, and perfected in them hereafter, is contained in what is said of the state of the angels, or the saints in light; "Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word:"† and again: "His servants shall serve him day and night in his temple; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever."‡ This, dear brethren, will be the felicity of heaven, and this, believe it, is placed before us as the only way and degree of happiness here on earth,—to be the servants of God and serve him, to love his law in all its breadth and length, to obey his commandments, and to do those things which are pleasing in his sight.

2. I observe, however, in the *second* place, that there is also needful, to form the character described in the text, *an inward conformity to the moral image of God:* "the law of his God is *in his heart:*" it is not said, in his head, or his mind, in his understanding, in his life, or conduct, but in his heart; that is, prior

* Isa. i. 2, 3. † Psa. ciii. 20. ‡ Rev. xxii. 3.

to his keeping that law as a rule of life, there must be a consent to it and a love for it in the will and affections of the inner man. Now here is the difficulty. Here is the main point of trial, the test of reality in all true religion. Decidedly, most decidedly, in every natural man, in every unconverted person, there is no love to the Divine law, but rebellion and enmity against it. Man by the fall has lost the image of his Maker, the mind and the love of holiness. And hence it is, that a "man must be born again," must be new-created, before he is able to take one single step in the way to heaven. In himself he has no desire to be holy; the commandment, which was ordained to life, is to him only unto death, and sin has slain him by it;* and of or from himself he cannot do any thing to effect a change in the natural disposition and desires of his mind: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?"†

Brethren, is it not so, and do you not many of you feel and confess it to be so? Do you not find that to turn to the Lord, and to love him with all your heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and to have his law in your heart, without he gives you grace for it, is an impractible thing? It is like throwing a weight into the air, which, however often you throw it, comes down again. It is like the door upon its hinges, or the wheel going round and round. You are "ever learning, it may be, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."‡ And is not the secret cause already well known and detected by you? Is it not this,—that you want a Divine renewing? You want that Omnipotent power which "moved" at the first "upon the face of the waters," to awaken your slumbering spirit, to imprint the image of God upon you, which all mankind have forfeited by the fall.

* Rom. vii. 10. † Jer. xiii. 23. ‡ 2 Tim. iii. 7.

That image of God is a lovely, holy image. It is seen, in some faint degree, in the glass of Revelation; it is exhibited to us in the character of Jesus Christ: spotless purity, perfect holiness, infinite justice, tender mercy, great humility, forgiving forbearance, and redeeming love. He was "holy, harmless, and undefiled." "Guile was not found in his mouth." He was "meek and lowly in heart." "Greater love had no man than he had, to lay down his life for his friends." He prayed for his enemies, even while he was suffering by them, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" He wept for a careless, guilty world. He spent, in respect of his human nature, days and nights in prayer. He "humbled himself to be found in fashion as a man, and to take on him the form of a servant, to become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." This was the mind of Christ, this was an exhibition of the moral nature of Jehovah. And to this, believe it, brethren, we must all of us be resembled, if we would be his saints, and live for ever with God in heaven. We must be transformed in the spirit of our minds, from our natural selfishness, pride, deceitfulness, earthly-mindedness, to be filled with love, and clothed with humility, to be meek, and lowly, and pure in heart, to be upright and just, and undefiled in the way, to put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind;—in short, to have the "mind," the "Spirit of Christ;—to have a holy nature, with all its affections raised to the things above, because Christ there sitteth at the right hand of God. Nothing but this is true religion. Nothing but this is saving. Nothing but this is either to be holy or happy here, or to be on our way to dwell with God hereafter. This we must seek for by daily effort, and by daily prayer, bowing our knees for it evermore to the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift, and then, and then only shall

we attain to this character of the true believer, "the law of his God is *in his heart.*"

3. There is yet one more idea contained in the text to complete the description it gives us of the believer's state and character. It is the idea of *possession:* "The law of *his* God is in his heart;" the law, not merely of an absolute God, but of his own God. This is an important particular in the character and privilege of saints: there is a covenant relation of nearness to the God they serve;—they can say with a bold assurance, "This God is our God for ever and ever:" they can say with David, "O Lord, thou art my God," or with Thomas the apostle, "My Lord and my God!"*

Now this possession of God by a gracious relation into which they are brought with him is another essential part of personal holiness in all his people. It is not enough to constitute true holiness that they are restored to a state of submissive creature-subordination to Creator-government, to keep the Divine law; it is not enough that that law is within their heart, that the holy image of God is imprinted again on their soul. There must be along with this, and there always is, an actual possession of God as their own God, as their satisfying portion and contentation. "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him."† And inasmuch as a man is here living by faith, in the use of means, to maintain a spiritual intercourse with an invisible God, but is hereafter to live with God in heaven, so this possession of God as his own God, in which holiness and happiness do essentially consist, must needs be of two kinds. It is a *spiritual communion,* and a *believing anticipation.* It is the essential character, therefore, of a really converted and sanctified state, that every

* Psa. xlviii. 14.—lxiii. 1. John xx. 28. † Lam. iii. 4.

one who has experienced it is brought into a new life of mysterious fellowship and intercourse with Jehovah; and it is also its characteristic, that now he is looking forwards, as a pilgrim and stranger upon earth, to that holy and blessed city, which God has "prepared" for his saints, because "he is not ashamed to be called *their* God."* The affections of such an one are set on the things above, and the language of his heart is, at every time, "Then only shall I be satisfied, when I awake up in thy likeness, and behold thy face in righteousness." Hallelujah! I am on my way to God.†

Now then here are *four* particular points which we have elicited from the text, as forming the character of saints, as combining together in the nature *of personal holiness*, to which it is the object and the work of renewing grace to bring mankind. What, do we ask, is true holiness, personal holiness, the holiness of the saints? 1. It is a state of cheerful, universal, *creature-obedience to the Divine law*, in all its broadness, as the rule of life, with respect both to God and man, and humbly walking with him, in all his appointments, and dispensations, as a faithful servant, a loyal subject, and a blessed child. 2. It is having that law *in the heart*, and cordially consenting to it, that it is holy, and just, and good: that is, having the *moral image of the Deity re-imprinted on the soul*, and the heart so changed, and the will so turned and converted, that a real love of holiness for its own sake, in all its gracious, and heavenly, and meek, and benevolent affections, has taken possession of the inner man. 3. It is to live in *habitual and frequent intercourse*, through Jesus Christ and by the Spirit, with the Great and Unseen Jehovah, as our *own* God; so that the life which is lived in the flesh may be justly characterized as a life of prayer. 4.

* Heb. xi. 16. † Psa. xvii. 15.

And it is to be waiting in such a state, and ever looking forwards, for that future day, when we shall "see him as he is," and enjoy the everlasting fruition, the full and unclouded realization, of the Eternal Godhead, "face to face and eye to eye." Then, beloved, if we attain to that blessed state, the law of our God will indeed be in our heart, without any conflict, any law of sin in our members, to interrupt it, or any infirmity, or any corruption to intervene. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but this we know, that we shall be like our Saviour, when we see him as he is."* No more trial of faith shall afflict us, no more sin have dominion over us, no more temptation assail us, but the weakness, and vileness, and darkness of our best estate upon earth, be exchanged, for ever exchanged, for immortal strength, and blessedness, and perfection.

II. Having thus established some statements respecting the nature of personal holiness, the state of regeneration described to us in the text, permit me in the next place, to *draw some deductions from it.*

1. I observe, *firstly,* that there is one very common condition of self-deception, which this description of true holiness completely detects and exposes: it is that *mistaken* and *selfish* view which many have of religion, that it is a *dispensation rather to make them safe sinners than to make them new creatures,* to make them happy rather than make them holy, to save them rather than to sanctify them. O what a feeble, imperfect, carnal view to have of the purpose of Christ's religion! His design in becoming a Saviour, a Jesus to such a world, was surely to save his people not *in,* but *from* their sins: it was not in the first place to save from hell, but to give them that law, that image of God in their heart, which should

* John iii. 2.

make them unfit for hell, but fit and meetened to be with him in heaven. My friends, if you have no other reason for looking into religion, and caring for it and striving to understand it, but just to be saved by it, just to escape from the fire that is not quenched, and the worm that never dies,—if you have no conception of the great and unspeakable happiness to be delivered from a sinful, carnal mind, a corrupt, unclean imagination, and all the tempers, and lusts, and prides, and passions of fallen nature, and to be made clean, and pure, and holy, as God, as Christ is holy, to be filled with meekness and love, and all the benevolent affections of heavenly minds,—if you are not striving for this as a greater object before you than even eternal safety, then you cannot have an evidence that you are born of God. Religion with you, is fear, constraint, necessity; religion with you, is bondage, and superstition; it is not liberty, nor enjoyment, nor light, nor power, nor grace, nor love.

2. A second state of mind, in which many persons are, is surely equally detected by this test which is here afforded us; the state, I mean, of those who are *measuring out their compliances with the laws of God* by what they *must* do, and what they *must* depart from, rather than by what they *can* and *may*: May I not have this little indulgence granted me, or must it be given up? Must I part with this favourite custom, amusement, or pursuit? Must I be always praying, and reading the Scriptures as my daily exercise? May I not stray from the house of God, at least one part of the day? May I not see his ordinance ready and go to my home and receive it not? Must I be so strict, so constant, on all occasions, and so self-denying? Surely this, my friends, is anything you please to pronounce it except the state described to us in the text, "the law of his God is in his heart!" If that were the case with you, would you not rather

be saying, "O Lord, when wilt thou come to me? How amiable are thy tabernacles, thou Lord of Hosts! my soul longeth, yea fainteth for thy courts! Search me and try me O God, prove me and know my heart, and see if there be any wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*

3. But we must yet proceed, brethren, one step further than these. The state described in the text does also expose and detect as a very imperfect and very mistaken religion, *that which consists of a constant labour and exertion*, however sincere, having little, in its exercise, but difficult striving against temptation, and little, in its result, but dissatisfaction and unsuccess. It could not be so, brethren, we put it to yourselves of it could be, if the love and the law of God were really within your heart. Then the yoke of Christ would be easy, and his burthen light. If the law were within the heart, then from the heart's abundance the mouth would speak and the life would act. There may indeed be a struggle; there is, and there always will be till death puts an end to it, a will of the flesh to crucify and subdue; and perhaps it is a sign for some little encouragement when a person is brought to feel this; then it is likely he is not exactly consenting, but swimming against the stream. Nevertheless, if grace were in proper exercise, if the heart were turned and the will converted, if the law of God were really, as much as it might be, within the heart, there could not be such a mournful, such an enslaved, such an always difficult experience. What is that exclamation we read of, "Thanks be to God who always maketh us to triumph in Christ?"† What is that declaration, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us?"‡ What

* Psa. ci. 2.—lxxxiv. 1, 2.—cxxxix. 23, 24. † 2 Cor. ii. 14.
‡ Rom. viii. 37.

is that exhortation, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice?"*

My friends, if you have found, therefore, this mournful and difficult struggle, unsuccessful and disappointing, to be the habitual characteristic of all your religious experience, then what shall we say to you? Plain, undeniably plain it is that you need more grace, much more and much greater grace, a larger and deeper work of that grace within you, before you can live to any purpose the life of faith, or have any thing like a well grounded hope, that you shall hold on your way, and end your course at the last in heaven.

III. Let me, therefore, in the last place, *offer some arguments to you,* why you should seek, as the first and principal thing, to attain to this blessed inward change, to have the law of your God implanted within your heart.

1. Consider the *misery and wretchedness of the opposite state of experience.* Depend on it, nothing else will ever make a man happy, or any thing like it, but this gracious and saving change, this Divine renewing. Who can be happy with a fallen, disordered, unclean, unholy mind, let the world bestow on him with it all that it can or may? Who, that has any even common philosophy, can ever be happy with a selfish, proud, rebellious spirit within him, his tempers unsanctified, his lusts and his passions unsubdued? Who can be at peace that is Satan's slave, led captive by him at his will, and in the midst of mere sensual indulgences, killing his conscience, and fitting himself as the fuel for everlasting fire in hell? Verily, sin, in the state of unsanctified nature, inflicts its own chastisement by its own malignity, and foredooms, by its secret

* Phil. iv. 4.

witness, its final condemnation. If even we could view it apart from the anger and curse of Jehovah, yet how awful the moral condition, which his Word has described to us, of unregenerate humanity! "the heart deceitful, and desperately wicked,"—"all its imaginations only evil continually,"—nothing proceeding out of it but "evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications,"—a "troubled sea casting up mire and dirt,"—a "cage of unclean and hateful birds,"—a "pot full of scum and filthiness,"—chambers of imagery filled with every form of creeping and abominable things." "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked:" for this is his state and condition, "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint; from the sole of the foot to the crown of the head there is no soundness in him, but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores."*

2. Contrast with such a condition the *great and unspeakable blessedness of the state described in the text,* "the law of his God is within his heart." What is the experience of such an one as a matter of actual reality? He is the "temple of God." He is a "habitation for God through the Spirit." His mortal body is the "living temple of the Holy Ghost."† Christ is "formed within him as the hope of glory." The fruits of the Spirit are brought forth in him, and the fruits of the Spirit are "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." The man who is unconverted is, at the best of his estate, and independent of fear of punishment, by his own moral condition a wretched being. But let a man come by the grace of the Holy Ghost to love God's holy law, and to bear his image, and then he can be happy. Then he has gotten a portion which cannot be taken from him.

* Jer. xvii. 9. Gen. vi. 5. Matt. xv. 19. Isa. lvii. 20. Rev. xviii. 2. Ezek. xxiv. Ib. viii. 12. Isa. i. 5. † Passim.

Then he is happy in divine and permanent enjoyments, in present peace and assurance. Then he is prepared for the sorrows and changes of life, for a dying hour, and the judgment-day.

> "Then let ten thousand storms arise,
> And tempests mingle earth and skies,
> No fatal shipwreck shall he fear;
> But all his treasure with him bear."

3. Consider *thirdly*, the awful, the dreadful consequence of being finally without this gracious, inward change. Would that the Lord may impress this conviction upon you! We are all on our way, without any possibility of escape, to stand at the bar of God. Soon, very soon, it will be decided by death, how we shall there appear. And O to appear there without the image of God on their souls, who shall calculate what that appearing would be to all the ungodly! Then no hope for ever of any renewing or gracious change within them! Even the present influences of the Holy Ghost would be withdrawn from them, to leave them to be driven away, without one particle of sanctifying tendency or restraining grace within them, the companions of the devil and his angels, and of wicked, accursed, and malignant spirits, for a long and a dreadful eternity! Then it will be vain to call on the hills and the rocks to cover them, to hide them from the curse of offended Deity, from the wrath of God and of the Lamb!*

4. *Lastly* consider, in the way of encouragement to seek for this blessed state, the "law of God in the heart," the *Almighty power which there is to bestow it upon us.* Omnipotent power is needful, for "with man it is impossible," but omnipotent power is likewise ready to achieve it, for it is of this very work our Lord has spoken that assurance, "with God all things are possible."† O for a simple faith for every

* Rev. vi. 16. † Matt. xix. 26.

one of us, just to believe and receive the promises, and to come to Christ, as an empty vessel, to be filled from his infinite fulness, to receive, in a spiritual sense, with a sweet and assured reliance, that large but faithful declaration, "God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that ye always having all sufficiency in all things may abound to every good work." Beloved brethren, consider the vast extent of the Divine engagements, made in the Mediator, and connected with fervent prayer. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son;" "hitherto ye have asked nothing; ask that ye may receive, that your joy may be full." "I say not to you, that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loveth you."* Remember, beloved, what was the very and only object for which the Lord and Saviour came down from his glory, and came to this lower world. It was to "seek and to save the lost." And then search for and look at the promises given you in his word, all of them, Yea, and Amen in Him. And then, beloved, plead them before him. Then ye afflicted and tempted, and as yet unprosperous souls, plead those promises before him, and ask large things of a gracious and faithful God. Ask for the gift of *Godly Sorrow*, of true repentance unto life: Jesus Christ is "exalted as a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance to Israel." Ask for the gift of a vital *Gospel Faith*: "faith is the gift of God," and Christ is its "Author and its Finisher." Ask for the grace of *Divine Love*: "the fruit of the Spirit is love," it is "shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost given unto us." And ask for the fruit of all this in the state of *Personal Holiness*, the "law of your God within your heart:" so ready and willing is the Lord and Saviour to give you this, that it is even his own petition, when praying to the Father for all that "should ever believe" on him, "Sanctify them."†

* John xiv. 13.—xvi. 24, 26, 27. † John xvii. 17, 20.

This is the whole of religion for man on earth,—this is the state for a Christian man to seek for,—this may we each of us find before we die,—this be the portion of each of us, beloved,—the image of God to be found upon us, when we stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, the great white throne and Him that sitteth upon it, before whose face the earth and the heavens shall flee away.* This let us therefore, while life is continued and time is given us, be each of us now imploring of the Lord, pleading in the spirit of the ancient patriarch for it, "I will not let thee go, until thou bless me;"—then shall it be fulfilled to us, "Ask, and it shall be given you, seek, and ye shall find."

* Rev. xx. 11.

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